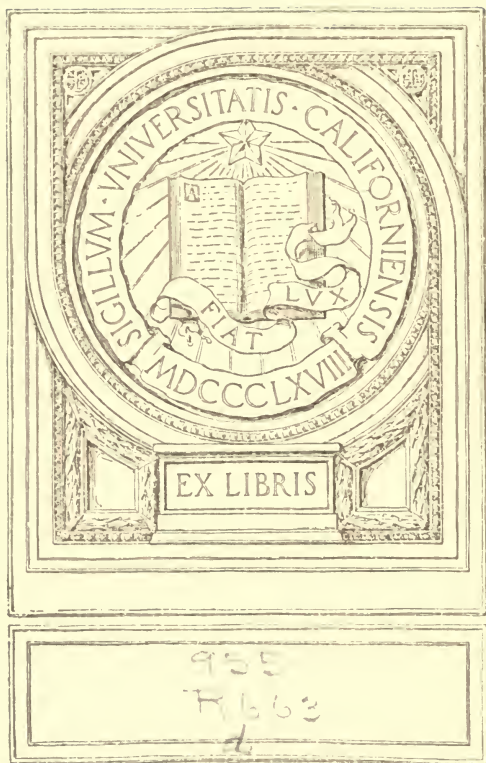


DANVIS FOLKS

ROWLAND E. ROBINSON



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By Rowland C. Robinson

UNCLE 'LISHA'S SHOP.

SAM LOVEL'S CAMPS.

OUT OF BONDAGE.

IN NEW ENGLAND FIELDS AND WOODS.

DANVIS FOLKS. A Novel.

UNCLE 'LISHA'S OUTING.

A DANVIS PIONEER.

SAM LOVEL'S BOY.

VERMONT: A Study of Independence. In
American Commonwealths Series. With Map.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

BOSTON AND NEW YORK

DANVIS FOLKS

BY

ROWLAND E. ROBINSON

AUTHOR OF "VERMONT" (IN THE AMERICAN COMMONWEALTHS SERIES)
"UNCLE LISHA'S SHOP," AND "SAM LOVEL'S CAMPS"



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

“DANVIS FOLKS,” with the exception of the first chapter, was originally published in “Forest and Stream.” It was written with less purpose of telling any story than of recording the manners, customs, and speech in vogue fifty or sixty years ago in certain parts of New England. Manners have changed, many customs have become obsolete, and though the dialect is yet spoken by some in almost its original quaintness, abounding in odd similes and figures of speech, it is passing away ; so that one may look forward to the time when a Yankee may not be known by his speech, unless perhaps he shall speak a little better English than some of his neighbors. In truth he uses no worse now, nor did he ever, though he is accused of it. Such as it was, some may be glad to remember, and chiefly for them these papers have been written.

R. E. R.

FERRISEBURGH, VT., *August, 1894.*

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DANVIS FOLKS.

CHAPTER I.

GRAN'THER HILL'S PA'TRIDGE.

THE September sun shone with summer-like fervor in the little valley of Danvis; not an afternoon of August had been hotter, or breathed a droughtier breath upon wilting forests and sere fields. Here and there among the dusky green of the woods, a tree nurtured by more sterile rootage than its neighbors was burning out its untimely ripeness in a blaze of red or yellow, from which the puffs of warm wind scattered sparks of color so intense that it seemed as if they might kindle the dry earth.

All nature was languid in the unseasonable heat and drought. The unrefreshing breeze blew in lazy puffs without even energy of direction, but listlessly trying this quarter and that, now bearing, now dropping, the light burden of a tree's complaining, the rustle of the rolled corn leaves, the faint whimper of tired brooks, the petulant clamor of the crows, and the high, far-away

scream of a hawk that, level with the hazy mountain peaks, wheeled in slow circles, a hot brown speck against the bronze sky.

The same wearied air pervaded the precincts of Joseph Hill's home and the house itself. The hens lay panting with drooped wings under the scant shade of the currant bushes, whose shriveled remnant of fruit gave no promise of refreshing coolness; their half-grown progeny stalked aimlessly about the yard in indolent quest of nothing, while they grated out the discordant yelp which is neither peep nor cluck, and expresses nothing if it be not continual discontent; and the ducks waddled home, thirsty and unhappy, from the dried-up puddle.

The hollyhock stalks stood naked and forlorn among the drooping leaves, with only here and there a blossom too stunted to tempt a bumblebee showing among the browning buttons of seed vessels. The morning-glory leaves hung limp upon their twisted vines, that had evidently blown their last purple trumpet to call the bees, clutching their supporting cords only with a dying grasp. All the house-side posies were withered, "chiny asters," "sweet-williams," and "sturtiums"; nothing held up its head but the sturdy houseleeks — hens and chickens their mistress called them, and nursed them in their box in doors and out the year round, for their oddity and their repute for curing corns.

Even Gran'ther Hill, whom age might wither though it could not sap his vitality, showed little of his accustomed vigor, as he sat in the doorway with his bristly chin upon his staff, staring vaguely on the haze-bounded landscape, or at something beyond the filmy veil unseen by other and younger eyes, the past or the future. Battlefields of Revolutionary days, lonely scouts in the great wilderness, secret missions in the service of the old Green Mountain Boys — or was he looking forward to the paths of the unknown, which he must presently tread?

Whatever occupied his thoughts, it apparently was not what was said or done by those near him. In the same room was his son, who sat with his chair tilted against the wall; and a well-fed, self-satisfied man, who, slovenly clad, though his blue coat had not been long worn and its brass buttons were bright, sat across the table from Joseph, with a small hair trunk open before him, packed brimful of paper parcels and tin boxes. Joseph Hill's eldest daughter, a tired, overgrown girl of twelve in an outgrown frock, moved wearily about the household labors that had fallen on her, and her younger brother sat disconsolately in one corner, nursing an aching tooth that kept him home from school. Their mother, who lay in the bedroom beyond, had been ill for weeks with an intermittent fever, but

was now "on the gain," thanks to the treatment of the keen-eyed, blue-coated man with the hair trunk full of roots and herbs and their tinctures.

He was a disciple of Dr. Samuel Thompson, a self-taught mediciner, who, many years before, had brought upon himself the wrath, bitterer than his own concoctions, of the regular physicians of New England by his unauthorized practice and his denunciations of their methods. In time they enlarged and improved their pharmacopœia by availing themselves of his discoveries, but gave him no credit, and few know to what "noted empiric" they are indebted for them. Joseph was conservative, and would rather have employed the old regular physician of Danvis than this innovator, or perhaps both, and his father was bitter "agin Injin an' ol' woman ways o' darkterin' ;" but this unlicensed practitioner had cured Maria's mother of "newrology," and him she was set upon having, and Joseph consented, according to his usual custom when "M'ri" insisted.

"Mis' Hill," said the doctor, looking over his spectacles and his trunk at Joseph, "is sights better. The reg'lar course we've gi'n her, lobele 'metics, steamin' an' sofuth, has hove off the agur spells an' the fever. All she wants naow is strenth'nin', suthin' tu give her an appetite t' eat, an' suthin' nourishin' t' eat. We're goin' tu leave her these here spice bitters, tu take a

small spoo'f'l steeped up in a teacup o' hot water three times a day ; an' you must git some popple bark, and steep up a big han'f'l on 't in a gallern o' water, an' hev her drink a ha' pint on 't most any time when she 's dry, or a dozen times a day ; an' it would be a good thing for her tu take a leetle pennyr'yal tea, say a teacupful three, four times a day, kinder 'tween times, an' then eat nourishin' victuals."

Gran'ther Hill turned his head and glowered savagely at him, but uttered only a contemptuous snort.

"I do' know," said Joseph, slowly easing the fore-legs of his chair to the floor and as slowly scratching his head, "but what M'ri kin hold some victuals arter she 's took all them steepin's, but it don't seem 's 'ough she could much, that is tu say, not a turrible sight. Ye see, Darkter, she hain't a turrible big womern, that is, not so big as some. But mebbly she kin. I d' know."

"Ye 'll draowned her wi' yer cussed slops!" Gran'ther Hill growled, turning in his chair and thumping the floor with rapid blows of his cane. "'F you 'd ha' gi'n her some callymill an' bled her 'n the fust on 't, she 'd ha' ben all right naow! You've roasted her an' biled her, an' naow yer goin' tu draowned her wi' yer pailfuls o' spice bitters an' popple soup, an' the Lord knows what tarnal slops!"

“Callymill is pizon, an’ tew much bleedin’ is what kills hawgs,” said the doctor with calm emphasis.

“Pizon is good when it’s took proper,” Gran’ther Hill retorted, “an’ folks hain’t hawgs, not all of ’em hain’t. I wish’t Darkter Stun ’ould come along an’ gi’ me a dost o’ callymill an’ bleed me; I know it ’ould make me feel better this tarnal roastin’ weather. It’s a feller’s blood ’at heats him. I c’n feel mine a chuggin’ up ag’in the top o’ my skull every beat o’ my pult, an’ I wish I was red of a quart on ’t!”

“You don’t look, Kepting Hill,” the doctor said, after a brief survey of the old man’s gaunt figure, “as if you hed a grea’ deal o’ blood tu spare.”

“I know ’t I’ve shed lots on ’t for my country,” said Gran’ther Hill. “But I’ve got ’nough left tu fill up tew, three pepper darkters wi’ better ’n they’ve got!”

“No daoubt on ’t, Kepting, no daoubt on ’t,” the good-natured mediciner answered, “but you don’t wanter waste it. Tew much good blood no man can’t hev, an’ aour remedies make bad blood good. You take some pepsissaway an’ put it in some ol’ Medford, an’ take a swaller three times a day, a good big swaller, Kepting, an’ see what it ’ll du for yer blood.”

“That saounds sensibler ’n the water swash

you was talkin' on, an' I begin tu think you know suthin' arter all. Jozeff, nex' time you go over tu Hamner's, you git me a quart, 'n' I'll gether me some pepsissaway, an' I'll put in three, four sprigs, an' try it."

"Reason is aour guide," said the doctor, "an' aour remedies is what Natur p'int's aout tu us. We don't make no secret o' what she tells us. Naow, these 'ere spice bitters is compaounded of several nat'ral plants, but the main ingrejencies is fever-bush an' bayberry. We hain't no secrets; all we 're after is the trewth."

"Go t' thunder!" growled Gran'ther Hill. "You 're arter yer livin', jes' as all on us is. Nothin' on this livin' airth riles me wus 'n hearin' darkters an' preachers gabbin' 'baout the' raslin' raound jes' for the sake o' duin' other folks good, when they an' ev'ybody knows it's theirselves they 're workin' for. Who they tryin' tu fool, — God amighty, or folks, or the' ownselfes?"

"Sartainly, we 've got tu live whilest we 're raslin' for the trewth, Kepting. You drawed pay when you was fightin' fer your kentry, an' you fit a leetle better, proberbly, 'n you would for nothin' but glory. Starvin' fodder that is, for livin' on in this world. An' that reminds me 't Mis' Hill wants suthin' nourishin' t' eat. The' hain't nothin' better 'n pa'tridge meat, which it is victuals an' medicine to oncte, for a pa'tridge is

containerly a-feedin' on a hulsome diet, fever-bush berries, wintergreen, pepsissiway, blackberries, popple-buds, and birch-buds, an' I do' know what all, of Nature's pharmycopy, which is dissimerlated through the meat. You never knowed a man tu git sick eatin' pa'tridge, did ye, Kepting Hill, or you, Mr. Hill?" and while waiting for a reply the doctor dived into the depths of his tall Leghorn hat for a red bandanna handkerchief, with which he vigorously mopped his face and blew a trumpet-blast of his nose.

"Not me," said Gran'ther Hill. "I've lived on 'em for weeks when I was scaoutin' 'long wi' Peleg Sunderlan', an' the wolves had drove all the deer off."

"Not tu aour haouse, we don't," said Joseph; "ner scasely git a taste on 'em sen' father gin up huntin'. Wal, that is tu say, exceptin' when Sam Lovel brings us a mess, or oncte when bub killed one with his bow-arrer, or mebbby ketched it in a snare, I d' know but he did."

"I did kill him wi' my bow-arrer," protested the boy, forgetting his toothache in his desire to assert his sportsmanship; "an' ol' he one he was, bigger 'n a rhuster, a thumpin' of a spreuce lawg I c'n show ye, an' I sneaked up julluk gran'ther tells o' Injins duin', an' I knawked him stiffer 'n a stake, 'n' I lit on him 'fore he —" Here a thump of the grandfather's cane reminded the

boy of the often-repeated maxim that such as he were to be seen, not heard, and muttering that he could "show 'em the lawg," he subsided into silence and the nursing of his aching jaw.

"I s'pose you c'n shoot Mis' Hill a pa'tridge, can't ye, Mr. Hill? They say the woods is so full on 'em 'at they 're a steckin' aout o' the aidges."

"No, Darkter," said Joseph, going over to the stove hearth for his pipe and beginning a quest for his tobacco, "I hain't no knack for huntin' pa'tridge. They allers see me afore I du them, an' by the time I git my gun up the' hain't nuthin' left but a glimp an' a noise, an' afore I c'n git my mind made up tu shoot at them onsartainties, as Sam does, an' father ustur, both on 'em is gone. I thought I left my terbarker on the manteltree shelf. Oh, there it is on the winnder stool."

"Wal," said the doctor, bending a benign glance upon the boy, "bub c'n git his mar a pa'tridge with his bow-arrer, I know, an' if he will, I 'll pull his tooth so 't won't ache again."

"I won't tech tu try fer no sech pay; but 'f they 'd let me take gran'ther's ol' gun, I 'd git one. The' 's a hull litter on 'em stays up in the aidge o' the parstur."

"You shoot a pa'tridge wi' my gun?" growled his grandfather, glowering upon him. "Ye

could n't hol' it tu arm's len'th a secont, you hain't staout 'nough tu pull the tricker 'f you c'd reach it, an' if ye could 't 'ould kick ye int' the middle o' next week! It's a man's gun, that is," pointing up to the long-barreled flint-lock that hung above the mantel, gray with all the dust which had fallen on it since the spring campaign against the crows, "an' it's killed moose an' wolves an' bear an' Injins an' Tories an' Hessians an' Britishers, an' it c'd tell who hel' it when it killed 'em. He hain't dead yit; an' 'f ye want a pa'tridge, he c'n git ye one, which his name is Josiah Hill. What ye say 'baout pa'tridge is sensibler 'n what ye say 'bout darkterin', an' Marier's goin' tu hev one. I'd be willin' fer you tu pick aout my victuals, but I'd ruther hev an' ol'-fashioned reg'lar larnt physican darkter du my darkterin'."

"Reg'lar licensed pizoners, they be, ign'antly killin' folks under kiver of the die-plomies," Dr. Wead protested in a discreetly low voice; then in a louder tone, "seem 's 'ough you was ruther along in years tu go huntin', Kepting. Better start aout some o' the young fellers, that aire Lovel, fer instance. They say he's a marster hand at huntin'."

"If ever I got sick o' anythin'," said the old man, bending his bushy brows in a savage frown and thumping the floor with his staff, "it's ever-

lastin'ly hearin' tell o' that aire Sam Lovel's huntin'! Ye 'd think, tu hear 'em talk, 'at me an' Peleg Sunderlan' wa'n't never nowheres 'longside o' him, — him 't was brung up on pa'tridge an' foxes tu be sot up 'longside o' men 't was raised when the' was painters and Injins in the woods thicker 'n red squirrels be naow! I s'pose he ken shoot tol'able well wi' his cannern fer nowadays, but I git almighty sick o' hearin' tell on 't. Jozeff here 's allers braggin' secont han' o' what Sam Lovel's done, an' Jozeff do' know one eend of a gun f'm t' other. Took arter his mother, 'n' she wa' no hunter. Bub, here, ac's more like, an' 'f he 'd ben borned fifty year ago, when the' was suthin' tu hunt, he 'd ha' ben a hunter." Even such faint praise banished for a moment the torture of the aching tooth, as the boy cast longing looks up at the ancient gun, whose brass mountings were brighter and more precious to his eyes than burnished gold.

"I 'm a-goin' tu git Marier a pa'tridge," the old man went on. "Good min' ter go right off. 'F I don't I will in the mornin'; I 've heerd a gun every oncte in a while all the art'noon. There 't goes ag'in," as a flat report came faint and echoless through the sultry air from the lower slope of the mountain side. "He hain't killin' nothin', I know by the way his gun saounds,

but he 'll scare ev'ythin' aout'n the woods er over the maountin. Guess I 'd better go right off an' git ahead on him."

"Better wait till the cool o' the mornin', father. They 'll all git settled back in the' haunts by then," Joseph suggested; and then in a loud whisper to the doctor, "He 'll fergit all 'baout it by then!"

"Wal, mebbly; I 'll see," said his father, settling back uneasily in his armchair, and again fixing his senile stare on the outer world.

"Naow, then," said Dr. Wead in a more cheerful tone than the proposal warranted, "naow, then, bub, 'f you seddaown in the door an' brace yer back ag'in' one post an' yer feet ag'in' t' other, I 'll red ye o' that aire pesky tooth in a jiffy."

"I do' wanter hev it pulled!" the boy whimpered. "It don't ache a mite naow!"

"It's unly foolin' on ye, bub," said the doctor. "That's a trick the pesky things is allers up tu. I won't hurt ye more 'n a minute, an' then you 'll be tu play an' practicin' wi' yer bow-arrer fer to shoot yer mar a pa'tridge."

"Why, yes, Josie," urged his father, "jest seddaown an' hev her aout julluk a man, an' I 'll git ye — le' me see, why, I 'll git ye a jew-sharp nex' time I go t' the store."

"Can't play no jew-sharp when I hain't got no teeth, more 'n gran'ther can," the boy half sobbed.

"Could n't ye give him suthin' tu kinder ease it up fer a spell?" Joseph asked, after puzzling his brains for a more tempting offer. "'F his mother was araound he c'd stan' it better."

The doctor shook his head. "Nothin' but cold iron 'll stop it."

"It 'll hurt like Sam Hill!" howled poor little Josiah.

"Look a-here, bub," said his grandfather, turning his chair again to face the room. "It hain't a-goin' tu be said 'at a boy 'at wants tu go huntin' wi' a gun, an' which he's named arter his gran'ther that fit tu Hubbar'ton an' Bennin'ton, to say nuthin' o' takin' Ticonderogue, is a-goin' tu raise a rumpus 'baout hevin' a mis'able leetle tooth pulled aout. If ye don't come right stret here an' seddaown in the door an' open yer maouth an' shet yer head, I 'll take ye up tu the leegislatur this fall, right afore them tew brass cannern 't we took f'm the Hessians tu Bennin'ton, an' hev yer name changed, the hull on't; Josier shall be Nosier, an' Hill shall be Holler, 'cause ye 'll be so low daown, an' 'cause ye 'll holler for hevin' a tooth pulled. An' if ye seddaown like a man an' say nothin', I 'll let ye shoot my gun tu a mark, 'f it kicks ye funder 'n ye shoot! There!"

The boy looked a moment into the relaxed sternness of his grandfather's face, and then, his

own pale but resolute, he walked over and took the prescribed position on the threshold.

"Git aout yer cant-hook, Darkter, whilst his grit 's up," said Gran'ther Hill, while Joseph retreated to the bedside of his wife, whither, with an appalled look dispossessing the wearied expression of her face, his daughter accompanied him.

The doctor, taking the terrible turn-key from his trunk, bestrode the boy, whose head he grasped between his knees, and in one brief but awful moment wrenched out the tooth and a suppressed groan.

"You 'll make a hunter an' a sojer," said the doctor. "You stood it like a major, an' I'm goin' tu wrop up that tooth in a piece o' paper for ye t' show folks."

The old man gave his grandson a gentle punch in the ribs with his cane to express his approval. "Ded n't hurt ye much naow, did it, bub?"

"The hole aches wus 'n the darned tooth did," said Josiah the younger. "When ye gointer let me shoot yer gun, gran'ther?"

"T'morrer, when I git back f'm huntin'," his grandsire promptly responded. "Say, bub, is that Mis' Purin't'n comin' up the rhud? Yes? Well, then, I 'm goin' huntin' right naow 'f she's comin' here, 'n I'll bate she be." Arising with all the speed that his stiff joints could compass,

he took down his gun, drew the iron ramrod and dropped it into the barrel, then measured the protruding end with his fingers, returned the rod to its pipes, threw the long barrel into the hollow of his arm, and critically examined flint and priming, before his son had come forth from the bedroom.

"Why, father, ye 'd better not go this arternoon, you 'll git your blood all het up!" Joseph expostulated.

"Your darkter says I hain't got no blood," his father answered, reaching up for the big powderhorn, the buckskin shot-pouch, and a wisp of tow for wadding, while he whispered loudly, "That aire Purin't'n womern 's a-comin', 'n' I 'd ruther git het an' sunstruck 'n tu hear her gab. Wonder Purin't'n never took tu huntin'."

"She wont stay long, not so turrible long, I don't scasely b'lieve she will, an' you c'n go an' lay daown in yer room," urged Joseph; and the doctor also made some attempt to dissuade the old man from going abroad, though it was noticeable that he was hurriedly packing the little hair trunk and hastily preparing for his own departure.

"Don't you go a-huntin' no pa'tridge for me," pleaded Maria's feeble voice from the bedroom. "A chicken 'll du jest as well."

"I tell ye you 're a-goin' tu hev a pa'tridge, an' I'm going tu git it!" the veteran protested.

“Wal,” said Joseph, making search for his hat in all places but under his chair, where it was, “ef you will go ag’in’ all reason, I’ll go ’long with ye, erless I’ll hev bub go ; er mebbe we’ll both on us go, tu kerry your game, ye know, an’ yer gun, an’ sech, an’ mek it kinder comf’table fer ye.”

“When I go huntin’ I don’t go ’t the head of a army, wi’ a fife an’ drum a-playin’,” cried Gran’ther Hill at the top of his cracked and whistling voice, “nor no lummuxes, an’ no bubs a-taggin’ tu my heels, a-scarin’ all the game outen sight an’ hearin’ wi’ the’ crackin’, an’ snappin’, an’ sloshin’, an’ gabbin’ ! D’ ye think I’m a five-year-ol’ boy ’t can’t go nowheres by hisself ? You stay ’t hum an’ tend t’ your own business, an’ I’ll tend tu mine !”

Lowering the muzzle of his gun to clear the lintel of the door, he went out as Mrs. Purington entered. Dropping heavily into the nearest chair and puffing out a brief salutation, she cast back her green gingham sunbonnet, and began fanning her hot face with her checked apron held by its nether corners.

“It is tew orfle hot tu stir aou’ door, but I thought I mus’ come an’ chirk up Mis’ Hill a leetle mite, an’ I tol’ him I would come if it melted me. I declare tu goodness I b’lieve it hes ! Whew ! Who ever see sech weather for

the time o' year? Hain't your caows s'runk the' milk orfle? An' aour cistern's mos' dry an' the spring hain't never ben so low sen' he c'n remember. I d' know what's going tu be become on us all 'f we don't git shaowers. It's enough tu make well folks sick an' tu kill sick folks, an' I p'sume tu say it will kill Mis' Hill. Haow is she anyway?" leaning forward to peer into the bedroom, her fat hands, still holding the apron corners, resting on her short lap. "Gittin' wus an' wus, I s'pose?" then, with a sudden fear, "'T hain't nothin' ketchin', I hope, — none of these ketchin' fevers?"

"No," Joseph assured her. "Intumittens, or some sech name, the darkter calls it. Suthin' like fev' 'n' aig; kinder wus 'n that, an' then ag'in, not so bad," he explained.

Her fears of infection set at rest, Mrs. Purington drew her chair to the bedroom door and set herself to comforting the sick woman.

"Wal, Marier, you du look peakeder 'n what I expected, an' it's a massy 't I come when I did, or I might not ha' seen you alive. Mis' Tarbell, his brother's wife's sister, was took jest the same way 'long in hayin', an' it hove her intu quick consumps hern, an' she died 'fore the graound froze up, which was some consolashern, 'cause 't wa'n't no such work diggin' the grave as 't 'ould ha' ben later. I du hope you feel prepared for the wust, Marier, I du."

“Ruby,” said Mrs. Hill, as her eye caught the scared face of her daughter, “I wish ’t you ’d gwaout an’ see ’f you can’t find that speckled hen’s nest. No, Mis’ Purin’t’n, I hain’t prepared for no wust. I’ve hed that, an’ I ’m better. All I want naow is some stren’tu to be up an’ a-doin’. Poor Ruby!” as her eyes anxiously followed the girl’s wearied footsteps. “It’s ben tough on her, an’ she’s putty nigh tuckered aout.”

The scared and tired girl got little comfort, except in escaping from the alarming and wearisome gabble of the visitor, in her listless, rambling search for the nest of the Dominique among the withered currant bushes and the rampant weeds, that in spite of the drought still flourished in the fence-corners, to the delight of the yellow birds, who, too busy to sing, if singing days were not over, gathered the seeds of pig-weed and red-root. Nor was there more comfort in moping by her mother’s posy-bed, whose neglected plants looked as tired as herself.

“That’s allers the way wi’ folks ’at’s got consumpshern,” continued Mrs. Purington, “a-thinkin’ they’re better when they’re growin’ wus — allers. An’ that pepper an’ steam dark-ter, — I met him as I was a-comin’ int’ the do’-yard, — a mis’able cretur tu look at. They say he jest biles folkses’ skins off, an’ turns ’em inside aout wi’ his lobeles ’metics. Ef I wa’n’t

so beat aout wi' the heat, I'd turn tu an' help Ruby fix up things, for it does look dreffle run daown 't the heel in the kitchin, — hain't ben int' the square room; but it does seem as if 't was all I c'd du jest tu set here an' comfort ye all I ken. I will fix yer piller," and she set to beating the pillow close to the convalescent's ears, and twitching it to and fro under her head. "I'd ha' sent up sis tu help Ruby, but she's daown to Huldys, an' they 're fixin' up fer uncle Lisher Peggs an' aunt Jerushy, which they're expectin' on 'em back from the West nex' canal-boat 'at comes. A turrible senseless piece o' business all raound; but they will hev it the' own way, — Huldys an' Sam." And so she went on with her torturing gabble, which the sick woman was thankful only tired, but did not frighten her.

Meanwhile Gran'ther Hill was hobbling across the fields towards the woods, followed by the longing eyes of his grandson. Dr. Wead, watching the bent figure from the height of his sulky-seat, rocking on its leathern thorough-braces, remarked to himself, "A stronery tough ol' critter for a man 'at's ben pizened wi' callymill fer the Lord knows haow many year, an' as contrairy as he is ol' an' tough."

He was a pathetic old figure to look upon as, supporting his stiffened legs with his staff, and trailing his long gun with the unforgotten handi-

ness acquired in years so far past that they were like a dream, he picked his slow way across the shrunken brook and into the skirt of the forest. The woods were very still, scarcely stirred by the light puffs of the breeze ; the birds, their summer songs forgotten, so silent, and the feeble current of the brook babbling so faintly, that the continuous murmur of the bees among the woodside asters was the sound most audible, save when a locust shrilled its prolonged, monotonous cry that presently sank with an exhausted fall to the droning undertone of the bees.

The aged hunter made his way through the bordering thickets and over the dry matting of old leaves with a stealthier tread than many a younger man might have, and scanned carefully with slow, dulled gaze the shaded depths of low-branched young evergreens, sapling poplars and birches, and thorny tangles of blackberry briars.

Suddenly fell on his ears the noise of scurrying feet among the dry leaves, and the warning "wish, quit, kr-r-r, quit ! quit !" of a grouse. Dropping his staff and bringing his cocked piece to a ready, he searched the thicket with eager eyes and presently discovered an alert dusky form skulking among the shadows. The long gun was aimed with almost the celerity if not with the precision of its ancient use in the boasted days when its owner scouted and hunted with doughty Peleg

Sunderland. The trigger was pulled, the flint flashed out a shower of sparks, and the old gun bellowed and kicked in a way worthy of its renown, and mowed a narrow swath through the stems of saplings and briers. The booming report, so different from the flat discharges which at irregular intervals during the afternoon had cracked through the sultry air, came to young Josiah's ears, and almost shook him from his seat on the rail fence with the thrill of delight it sent through him.

Rushing into the house, he loudly proclaimed, "Gran'ther's fired. Yes, sir! I heard him!" and in the next breath, "I'm goin' t' see what he's got!'

"Don't you dast tu!" his father said with unwonted decision. "'F he hain't killed nothin', an' 'tain't no ways likely 't he hes, though the's no tellin' but what he hes, he'll be madder'n tew settin' hens. Don't ye dast tu go, bub!"

"Jest's like's not his gun hes busted, er gone off 't wrong eend, er suthin', an' killed him," said Mrs. Purington. "Guns is dreffle dang'ous things. It's 'nough tu dry up a feller's blood wi' col' chills tu hear father Purin't'n when he was alive, an' uncle Lisher, tell o' the folks 'at got killed by 'em tu Plattsburgh fight, which they was both there. Don't ye go nigh, Bub

Hill. 'T'ould scare ye t' death tu see your gran'ther a-lyin' in his gore."

"Hed n't you better go an' see, Joseph?" said Maria anxiously.

"Sho!" said her husband. "Father could n't shoot hissself wi' the ol' gun erless he got someb'dy tu help him. It's longer 'n a brook, an' it never busts, leastways it never did 's I knows on. Ketch me a-goin' nigh him 'f he's missed. He'll make things gee, a-blamin' it onter all creation but hissself."

Thus admonished, the boy went back to his perch on the top rail, to content himself with impatient watching for his grandsire's return.

It was well he did not seek him, for he would have found him then in his most peppery mood. Quicker than the echo of the discharge had come a rapid beat of wings and a brief scurry among the dead leaves. The old man stooped low and peered beneath the slowly lifting smoke, almost confident that he would see his victim fluttering out its last breath in or near the ragged path of the charge. But there was nothing to be seen astir but a sapling slowly bending to its fall from its half-severed stem, a sere leaf wavering to earth, and the eddying haze of rising smoke. Ah! the bird was stone dead, and lying there somewhere, waiting to be picked up without casting one reproving glance upon his slayer from

his glazing eyes. Gran'ther Hill was glad of that, for like all old hunters he had grown tender-hearted toward his prey.

First he reloaded his gun, measuring powder and shot in his palm with scrupulous care in spite of his haste to go forward, and then, stooping low, groped his way into the thicket. Scanning the ground foot by foot, often misled this way and that by some semblance of what he was in quest of, objects that upon poking with his staff proved but gray and russet stumps or clots of old leaves, he crept on far beyond the range of his gun, growing less hopeful with each more wearied step. Then he retraced his course, zig-zagging across it, peering into hollow logs and probing brush heaps with his staff, and then took his bearings anew from the place where he had shot, and went over the ground again and again, rewarded only by finding one mottled tail-feather, which he thrust in his hat to disprove a total miss, and grew more rebellious against fate with every unsuccessful attempt to find his bird, which, in fact, sat unscathed amid the branches of a fir, recovering from the terror of the sudden storm of lead that had so lately hurtled past it.

“What tarnel dodunk loaded that aire gun, I wonder?” he growled, glaring savagely into space. “Did n't put no wad top o' the paowder, I'll bate,

er the shot was tu big er tu small er suthin'! Er 't was some of that cussed paowder o' Chapin's; 't won't burn no quicker 'n green popple sawdust, an' the pa'tridge seen the flash an' dodged! But I hit him, I know I did! I never missed a settin' shot in my life, an' he lays right here clus tu, deader 'n hay, on'y I can't see him! Blast my darned eyes, a-failin' on me jes' naow, arter eighty-six, goin' on eighty-seben year! I wish 't I hed my specs; I wish 't I let Jozeff's boy come 'long wi' me, he's sharper eyed 'n a lynk; he'd ha' faound him. I'll fetch him here an' hev him look, an' ef he don't find him I'll skin him. 'F I thought 't was you 't made me miss him," shaking his gun till the ramrod rattled in its pipes and wooden casing, "ye ol' wore aout, goo'-for-nothin' iron hole, I'd wallupse ye raound a tree, darn ye! But I did n't miss him, he 's lyin' dead clus tu, 'mongst some o' these cussed rhuts an' bresh. Darn yer cussed hidin' tricks!" addressing the trees and shaking his staff at them, "can't ye let an ol' man 'at fit fer ye when you wa'n't knee-high tu a tud-stool hev one leetle, nasty, mis'able pa'tridge fer his sick darter? Darn ye, I wish 't ye 'ould all burn up an' roast yer cussed pa'tridges inside on ye!"

For answer came a rustle of feet suddenly grown careless where they trod, and then appeared through the parted branches the tall form

and good-natured face of Sam Lovel. The old man stared half-angrily, half-ashamed, at the apparition.

"Why, Gran'ther Hill, you a-huntin' this hot day?" Sam asked.

"Yis, I be," the old man answered testily. "I do' know but I got jes' 's good right tu go a-huntin' hot days as other folks."

"Sartainly, gran'ther, sartainly; but I did n't s'pose the' was nob'dy else but me sech a fool as tu go huntin' sech weather. Ye know some on 'em calls ev'rybody fools 'at goes huntin' any time. Wal, what luck be ye hevin'?"

"The cussedest luck I ever see. I come tu git a pa'tridge fer Jozeff's wife 'at 's sick, an' I shot one fust thing, an' I can't find the darned thing, an' it hain't tew rod off f'm where we be."

"Wing broke, an' hid?"

"No, sir, killed deader 'n hay, jest one kerflum-mux an' still; an' I can't find it nowhere, nothin' but this tail feather."

This Sam examined, but did not suggest the patent fact that it was not cut out by a shot, nor the possibility of a miss. "Wal, naow, mebbly I c'n help ye find him; four eyes is better 'n tew sometimes. I s'pose you hain't shot a pa'tridge afore for a good spell, an' you would n't ha' ben tryin' naow only tu git one for M'ri. Wal, le' 's see, you sarch in there, an' I'll try up this way.

He 's flummuxed inter some bresh heap er hol-ler, I bate ye. An' they look julluk the dead leaves 'f they don't lay belly up, anyway."

Searching intently in one direction while the old man pottered in another, Sam presently shouted gleefully, "Here he is, gran'ther! Deader 'n a mallet, lyin' in a bresh heap 't you 've trod onter! You most took his head off an' knocked him gally west. It was jest the stren'th o' the shot 'at hove him here!" and Sam reappeared, holding a rather rumpled partridge, whose head dangled from the ruffed neck by a film of skin.

The old man, more pleased than a child with a coveted toy, took the bird and smoothed its rumpled feathers, so absorbed that he did not notice the softened thud, mixed with the careless scuff of Sam's foot, of something that fell between them.

"Wal, I'll be darned!" Sam ejaculated in suppressed surprise; "ef here ain't another 'at we're most treadin' onter!" and stooping, he picked up another partridge, that with its life had almost lost its head.

"Tew tu one shot, by the gret horn spoon! Wal, gran'ther, you beat the hull caboodle!" and he patted the veteran's shoulder tenderly. "I never done that but oncte, an' I've bragged on 't ever sence."

Gran'ther Hill's blank stare of astonishment

relaxed into a toothless grin of supreme delight, and his bleared eyes were dim with unaccustomed moisture.

"I knowed the' was one a-lyin' here somewheres, but I never 'spected the' was tew," he said, his voice trembling with the swelling and throbbing pride of his heart. "Young eyes is sharper 'n ol' ones, an' I'm a thaousan' times obleeged tu ye' fur findin' my pa'tridges. I'd abaout gi'n up, an' was goin' hum tu git Jozeff's boy tu help me find the one 't I knowed I killed; he's got eyes julluk a lynk, an' 'ould ha' made a hunter 'f he'd ben borned soon 'nough, when the' wus suthin' wuth huntin'. These 'ere'll jest set Marier right up, an' fore they're gone, I'll git her another. They thought 'I could n't git nary one, but 't ain't nothin' tu kill a pa'tridge when ye know haow;" and all the while he was slowly turning the birds before his admiring eyes.

"Naow 'f I c'n find me some lutherwood, I'll tie them pa'tridge laigs together an' sling 'em crost my gun an' g' hum. You don't see some handy, du ye?"

Yes, Sam saw a sprawling moose-wood or wicopy close at hand, and presently fitted the old man out with a thong of its tough bark, where-with the birds were tied together, ready for sling-ing on the gun barrel.

"'T ain't every day 't ye see a man goin' hunt-

in' wi' a gun in one hand an' a cane in t' other," Gran'ther Hill chuckled ; " but the ol' gun an' me hain't forgot aour ol' tricks 'f we do go wi' a cane. It 's kinder cur'ous 't I hit 'em both in the neck an' nowheres else 'cept knockin' aout one tail feather, an' there it is, a-missin' ;" but he did not notice that the feather in his hat did not correspond in length or markings with those in the tail of the bird that he was inspecting.

" The ol' gun kerries turrible elus," Sam exclaimed, " an' jes' one stray shot hit the tail — glanced on a twig like 's not."

" An' hain't you killed nary one ? " the old man asked, only now noticing that Sam carried no game in sight. " I swan, I 'd ort tu divide wi' ye," making a feeble motion toward untying one of his birds.

" Wal, yes, I got tew, three in here," patting the pocket of his striped woolen frock.

" Wal," the old man said, slipping the birds on to his gun and shouldering it, " I s'pose I mus' be a-moggin'. Do' know haow I 'm goin' tu make up ter ye for findin' my pa'tridge, erless I go 'long wi' ye some day an' show ye haow tu hunt pa'tridge."

" That 'll jest du it," said Sam heartily. " Some cool day, t' rights, 'fore they git wild wi' the fallin' leaves, we 'll go. I want tu see ye kill tew 't a shot."

And so they parted, each going his way, the young man skirting the woods, the old man homeward, picking his way across Stony Brook with a lighter step and a lighter heart than he had come with. He minded nothing of the hot, droughty weather; no day could have seemed finer than this in its decline, its warm air laden with the odor of the firs, and the "cheop" of the crickets beginning to thrill through it, while the purple of the asters grew darker in the blurred, lengthening shadows. As he crossed the pasture he began to whistle toothlessly, "We 're marching onward toward Quebec," and his rheumatic footsteps fell to the time of the old martial air.

Then he saw his grandson running to meet him.

"Oh, gran'ther!" cried the boy breathlessly, as he caught a glimpse of the old man's swinging burden, "ye got one, did n't ye?" and then as he walked puffing and eager-eyed alongside, "Tew on 'em! Oh, my sakes, tew! I never hearn ye shoot but oncte. You never killed 'em both tu one shot, gran'ther?"

"Sho, bub, that hain't nothin' for a man 'at onderstan's it," said his grandfather lightly.

"Oh, gran'ther! you c'n jest beat 'em all, you can. Say, gran'ther, le' me kerry 'em, won't ye? Gran'ther, say?" the boy pleaded.

"Jullook a-here, bub," said the old man, sink-

ing his voice to a husky undertone, "you le' me kerry 'em, an' I 'll let ye shoot the gun tu a mark right naow! Hey?"

"Oh, my sakes! Will ye, naow, t'-night?"

"Yes, sir, I will. You go an' set that aire busted cap ag'in the fence, ten rod off, an' come back here an' rest crost this 'ere stump an' let 'er hev!"

Away the boy ran, never minding a stubbed toe or a heelful of thistles that waylaid his course, and, setting the broken fence-cap against a rail, came panting back.

"Git ye breath fust," Gran'ther Hill said, as the boy reached eagerly for the gun, which the old man took slowly from his shoulder, depressing the muzzle till the partridges slipped to the ground. "Ye could n't hit a barn-door tew rod off whilst ye 're a-puffin' that way. Naow," as the boy's breathing became regular through hard restraint, and he gave the gun into his hands, "p'int below the mark, an' raise her up slow, an' when ye git aimed atween the tew holes, onhitch!"

Kneeling and resting the long barrel across the stump, the boy slowly elevated the muzzle till it hid the lower auger hole, and then pulled with might and main, shutting both eyes in expectation of the flash and recoil, but neither came.

"I can't pull her off," he whined, in half-tearful disappointment.

“Ye can’t pull her off when she hain’t on’y half cocked, ye gump!” said the old man impatiently, and reaching out he pulled the heavy hammer to full cock. “There, naow, when ye pull the tricker, I guess ye ’ll hear from her!”

Again the boy essayed, pulled manfully at just the right moment, and there was a shower of sparks, a blinding flash of ignited priming, a deafening roar, and with it a kick that tumbled the young marksman on to his haunches.

“You hit it!” the old man cried, “I seen the splinters fly! Naow run over ’n’ fetch the cap here.”

The boy made all haste to get upon his feet, and ran wildly over to the fence, rubbing, as he ran, his shoulder, that ached with a more universal pang than his tooth had done. But it was a delightful pain, and borne with a triumphant smile when he saw the weather-worn surface of the wood brightened with fresh splinters and punctured with a half dozen dark holes, and as many half-embedded shot staring at him as if in astonishment at his skill.

“Ye done well, bub, so ye did!” said his grandfather, when the target was brought to him and inspected. “She scattered more ’n she did when I shot the pa’ttridge, but I s’pose I got in a leetle tew much paowder; but you done almighty well.”

So they went home, the one as proud as the other, the old man with his birds, the boy with his target, he running ahead to proclaim the wonderful achievements of the twain. It was a pleasure added to the old man's triumph, another reward of his afternoon's outing, to see the departing form of Mrs. Purington waddling homeward along the highway.

The two were welcomed with all the honors they could desire ; even Mrs. Hill came forth from her bedroom to view the trophies, and the youngsters home from school were dumb with admiration of the feats of their grandfather and brother. Gran'ther Hill recounted all the details of his afternoon's adventure, and ended by saying : —

“ I don't b'lieve I 'd ha' faound one of 'em 'f 't had n't ben for that aire long-laiged Sam Lovel ; ” and Joseph, picking the birds, unmarked but by the bullet holes in their necks, remarked with a twinkle in his eyes that no one saw : —

“ I don't scarcely b'lieve ye would, father ; don't seem 's 'ough ye would.”

CHAPTER II.

TWO RETURNING PILGRIMS.

A HOMESICKNESS, that time could not cure nor alleviate, became so insufferable to Elisha Peggs and Jerusha his wife that, after enduring it for three years, they bade farewell to their son and daughter-in-law and to the grandchildren who had been the strongest tie to hold them to their uncongenial Western home, and set forth on the long journey to their native town of Danvis.

At first they voyaged on the Great Lakes, beset with the alarms and qualms that would attend such old inland-bred folks, then with greater comfort on the Erie and Champlain Canals. Their journey on the canal packet brought them frequently into a stir of busy life, wonderful and bewildering to their unworldly wisdom. It often had a pungent flavor of trivial incident and accident not always pleasant in present experience, yet always accounted of future value in the story to be told to the untraveled home folks whom they were soon to meet. At intervals, they made brief passage through commercial towns whose stir and bustle of traffic set their quiet brains in a whirl,

and rang in their ears long after their boat was again gliding through the quietude of farms and woodlands.

Now, they were voyaging more pleasantly, beyond the turmoil of towns, the bickerings of rough-mannered boatmen, the shrill imprecations of impish drivers, and the pain of seeing jaded horses always before them on the tow path, to whose toil they were adding a moiety of burden. A lively and industrious little steamer that never gave sign of weariness was now towing their long narrow canal packet out of the marshy windings of Lake Champlain's upper channel into widening waters. A restful home feeling began to come upon them with a sense of proprietorship in the landscape. For here on their right hand lay their own beloved Vermont, with its eternal mountains and its homesteads grown gray in the possession of generations of one name. There were bawling teamsters with plodding oxen plowing snugly fenced fields, Morgan horses trotting along the highways, and flocks of merino sheep dotting the tawny pastures with flecks of umber and streaking them with devious lines of pathway often tending toward gnawed and nibbled stacks that looked like immense mushrooms growing in the dun fall fed meadows. Such familiar scenes, thinly veiled in the ethereal web of an Indian Summer day, gladdened their homesick hearts as they sat on the deck.

The tide of travel was setting westward, and in its feeble backflow this old couple found themselves with but few companions, and these not very congenial ones.

The captain was courteous in his way to these old-fashioned folk, but was more drawn to conversation with his younger passengers, and his sole male assistant was a surly fellow who sulked at his post and received questions as if they were personal affronts, while he ground huge quids of tobacco as if they were the hearts of his enemies, and his enemies all mankind. The stewardess and the cook, who composed the female portion of the boat's company, were reticent concerning their own affairs and not much interested in Aunt Jerusha's history, which she freely imparted to each of them. So the two old people consorted mostly together, she taking in all the sights as they sat on deck, while she industriously knitted a blue woolen stocking, and he lounging near her in enforced idleness, wishing he was on his familiar, leather-bottomed shoe-bench, tapping a boot or closing up a seam with a waxed end.

Most of their fellow-passengers were returning from spying out the land of promise, to sell their gear at any price, and remove their families to the region of unlimited possibilities, which they were continually vaunting, while the impossibilities, except in the direction of poverty, of their

New England birthright, were as continually set forth, to the disgust of Uncle Lisha's loyal Yankee soul.

"It's a dirty bird 'at faouls his own nest," was his reply, to their disparagement of his beloved stony soil. "I druther hev the leetle chunk o' V'mont sile 'at's goin' tu kiver my ol' bones 'n tu hev the hull splatteration o' yer West."

"There ain't room enough 'mongst your hills to lay you down level," said a dapper little man who was the acknowledged wit of the company.

"Wal, then, let 'em stan' me up in a post-hole. I druther hev the top on 't 'an a hull perary. Don't you tell me baout your fever 'n' aguy, flat-ted-aout, humsick West. I ben there. Go tu that dumbd pancake of a country 'f you want, but le' me stay nigher tu God amighty's maountains."

"I never see sech a harnsome country," declared one enthusiastic pilgrim. "Why, I rid more 'n a hundred mild an' never see one hill higher 'n a haystack. An' sech crops o' corn an' wheat! More on one acre 'n you c'n git on five here."

"Honh," Uncle Lisha snorted contemptuously. "As ef it was a vartu in a country to be so flat, water do' know which way tu run. Blast the crops, the' ha' no heart in 'em 'f they be big. I druther hev a peck o' Dutton corn, yis, er Tucket, than a bushel o' their hoss-tooth corn, wi' no more

taste in 't 'n moonshine. I tell ye, the' 's one crop raised 'mongst these maountains 't can't be beat, 'n that 's stiddy, ol'-fashioned, hum-bidin' men an' women. Not but what the' 's lots o' clever, free-hearted folks aout West, but they 're in such a tarnal hurry it makes me tired, an' the everlastin' flatness makes me humsick."

There was also a land speculator, in shabby clothes and a pervading uncleanliness, with a portfolio of plans of unbuilt cities, which he persistently spread before every eye that would follow his dirty, talon-like forefinger as it pointed out the most desirable lots and traced the lines of traffic that were surely to be established. "I 'll guarantee to make any man rich, yes, sir, forty men rich, if they 'll follow my advice and buy as I tell 'em."

"Good airth an' seas," cried Uncle Lisha, returning his spectacles to their steel case and shutting it with a spiteful snap after a brief inspection of the maps. "Ef I hed sech a chance tu make other folks rich, I 'd try it on myself fust, an' ef it worked, I 'd buy me some store clo's an' a hunk o' soap;" and thereafter the land speculator was silent in the old man's presence.

Presently the hoary ruins of Ticonderoga confronted them on the western shore, and it was as if its self-vaunted hero, Gran'ther Hill, had come to welcome them to the dismantled fortress. Then

Chimney Point and Fort St. Frederic's shattered walls swung apart before them, and they passed into the broad expanse of calm blue water that between pleasant shores stretched far away into the pearly haze, where rock-anchored, purple islets and white sails of laggard craft hung alike moveless on the undefined verge of lake and sky. Then far away to the northeast, silently welcoming them, in ghostly grandeur the landmarks of their State, Mansfield and Camel's Hump, towered through the film of haze; and what warmed their hearts still more, the lesser peak of their own Danvis mountain, in whose shadow they had dwelt so many years.

How impatient they were to be there again, yet dreading the changes that time, in a little space, might have wrought, and conjecturing no end of obstacles that might still interpose to hinder their safe return. It was weeks since they had heard from the old home, for the East and West were far asunder in those days of half a century ago, and evil as well as good tidings passed slowly from one to the other.

Flocks of wild fowl arose reluctantly from the glassy surface of the lake at the steamer's approach, settling again still further on; or, making curved detours, alighted so close astern that their distorted doubles came crinkling across the furrows of the wake to mingle with the broken re-

flection of the canal-boat's painted side. The lazy cawing of crows came floating in softened cadence from the gray woods where they lingered, loth to journey from a land so steeped in mellow sunshine. A hound's sonorous baying, swelling and falling among the wooded low hills, reminded the old man of his hunter friend, Sam Lovel, and, through him, of all Danvis friends and neighbors.

"It 's hopesin' they're all well and hearty," was his fervent prayer.

Now the ragged escarpments of Split Rock Mountain began to respond with sharper, quicker echoes than the low shores had given to the regular, tireless pant of the steamer. The sun was low in the west, and they beheld the miracle of rapidly recurring sunsets as the red, rayless disc sank from view behind the bristling silhouette of a pinnacled peak, then emerged in the rugged scoop of a gorge, then sank and rose again, till at last their long weariness of prairie life was refreshed with the abiding and deepening shadows of the mountain.

Making a wide sweep toward the eastern shore, where the sunset still glowed on hills and tree-tops, the steamer presently dragged her inert consort on to the fading flush that lay like a motionless sheet of flame on the tranquil breast of the Otter, till her wake set it flickering and palpitat-

ing in long, undulating lines, that were buffeted back from the shores in myriad scintillations; while like quenched brands, the black, broken reflections of tree-trunks were tossed on the slow waves. On the right bank of the low promontory at the river's mouth was a barrack-like stone tavern for the accommodation of steamboat travelers, and in front of it, along the rocky verge of the lake, ran the grass-grown zigzag of a low rampart. The sight of this warmed Elisha's heart with patriotic fire, for here, in the last war with England, he had witnessed the gallant defense that saved McDonough's warships, then lying in the river, from destruction by a fleet of British gunboats, and made possible the grand achievement which swept the British armament from the lake.

"The milishy was all called aout that time," said he, "me 'mongst the rest, though I hed n't no gret stomerk fur fightin'. I wa'n't ezackly here; my comp'ny was posted over north tu Hawley's, kinder watchin' daown the lake fur the British. We seen 'em comin' 'way beyund Split Rock, a hull snarl o' black gunboats an' some sloops an' a big brig, I guess they called it, wi' sails a-loomin' up like meetin'-haousen, an' we gin the 'larm tu the sailors an' artillery fellers over here. An' bimeby the gunboats come a-creepin' up julluk black snakes, an' they begin firin' th' cannerns at the

leetle fort, an' oncte, a ball hit that aire ellum-tree right on the eend o' the p'int an' took a chunk right off 'm one side, you c'n see the scar naow. The leetle fort, Fort Cassin, they called it, fur the leftenant commandin' on 't, gin em as good as they sent, an' the cannern thunderin' an' the echoes rumblin' an' baoundin' back an' tu, made a n'ise like twenty Fo'th o' Julys rolled intu one. We c'ld see pooty nigh the hull caboodle on 't f'm where we was over t' other side the bay, an' bime-by we seen the gunboats a-crawlin' off, clean licked aout, tu where the ol' he boat was stan'in' off jul-luk a henhawk sailin' over a barnyard, an' then they all put off down the lake 'n' aout o' sight. I tell you we hoorayed when we seen 'em a-clearin' aout, fur we was jest as tickled as if we 'd helped lick 'em, I don't know but tickleder, an' we knowed 'at McDonner's ships was safe ag'in. Nex' day they was aout in the lake, a pooty sight tu see, an' ready tu lick anythin' that come afore 'em, an' off they went north, an' hum went we, an' wa'n't bothered wi' no more sojerin' till we went hurryin' off tu Plattsburgh fight."

His wife had heard the story scores of times, but never with so much interest as now when the scene lay close before her, yet it was set in such serenity of peace that she could scarcely imagine it disturbed by the turmoil of battle. A little girl stood on the grass-grown rampart, watching

the passing boats, and from open windows of the barrack-like stone inn came the merry notes of a fiddle and the romping footfalls of a dancing-party, so early entered upon a night of untiring gayety.

The passengers gathered about the narrator in an attentive group.

"Wal, I want er know," said one, looking with awakened interest on the ruins that before had appeared so insignificant, "so they raly fit right here. You don't say."

"It don't look much like it now," said another, "so kinder peaceful like, an' a fiddle a-goin' jes' 's if nothin' hed n't never happened. Diff'ent music then, I guess the' was. I'd ruther be shakin' my hummels tu this sort of a jig."

"Wal, bein' 'at you sorter fit fer V'mont," said one who had most glorified the West, "I don't wonder 'at you be kinder praoud of her sile. I guess I 'd be."

"I did fight fer her in arnest, tu Plattsburgh," said the old man proudly, "an' seen British reg'lars runnin' away f'm V'mont milishy. The' was a snarl on us, more 'n the' was o' Yorkers, though it was on their sile. I wisht then 'at I was tu hum, but I ben glad ever sence 'at I was there, duin' what I could, in my feeble way."

"I p'sume to say that 's the way folks gen'ally feels, erless they get licked er killed. Proberbly

that makes a diff'unce in the' feelin's," the first speaker remarked and there was a general assent.

Presently, sight of the place and then its jolly sounds were shut out by a wooded bend of the river as the steamer steadily plowed her way up the slow current. The south wind was rising with premonitory sighs among the leafless button-woods, whose huge ghostly trunks lined the banks, and Jerusha was thankful that their craft would make the remainder of her voyage in such safe and narrow waters.

Night was falling, and the steamer briefly parted the thickening shadows with the glimmer of her lanterns and stirred the quiet of the shores with her regular panting and its vibrating echoes. After a time there was heard through these the continuous monotone of the great cataract which would presently bar their further voyaging. Its incessant thunder, rolling in swelling volume down the winding lane of water, came to them now, a pleasant sound of welcome, not the sad voice of farewell that three years ago had lingered in their ears with solemn, dying cadence, long after the forms of friends had faded from their sight. At the Falls, some of those friends, long since apprised of their coming, would now be awaiting them, and the boat surging steadily onward, up the dark channel, went more slowly than their hearts, to meet them.

At length the lights of the town shone down from the hill, and beacon lanterns on the wharves glittered across the black eddies and white foam-streaks, and then, amid much confusion and shouting of orders from steamer, canal-boat, and shore, the packet was got into her dock.

The two old people eagerly scanned the illuminated group of bustlers and idlers for some friendly face. Over and over all the faces their eyes went again and again, but found not a familiar one nor one that brightened at sight of their own.

“Good airth an’ seas,” cried the old man in sorrow and vexation, “hain’t the’ one on ’em ’at cared ’nough ’baout us tu come so fur tu meet us? I wisht I was back in Westconstant, I du.”

“Oh, father, you don’t nuther,” said Aunt Jerusha, ready to cry with disappointment, herself. “They hain’t never got aour letter, I know they hain’t.”

“Mebby,” he admitted, “but I don’t see haow they c’d help gettin’ on ’t. I tol’ the post-office feller tu send it right stret along.”

“They hain’t never got it,” she reiterated, “fur ’f they hed, Samwill er some on ’em would ha’ ben here. An’ who knows but what they’re all sick er suthin,” she suggested.

“Sho, ’t aint no ways likely ’t they be, the hull caboodle on ’em all tu oncte,” he answered.

“Wal, anyways, the’ hain’t no use o’ s’misin’ er tewin’; we’ll git there some way, tu-morrer. Le’ me see, hain’t tu-morrer Tuesday? An’ that’s the day the mail goes tu Danvis, an’ we c’n gwup in the mail wagin ef the’ hain’t no other way turns up. Come, le’ ’s go ’n’ git ontu aour shelves oncte more an’ go tu sleep. It mus’ be as much as ha’-past eight.”

So saying he turned to lead the way below, casting as he went a last look on the group still lingering about the wharf. The change of position brought into view a figure which before had not caught his eye, but now suddenly arrested and held it. It was a man rotund of form and feature, who, in the background, leaned against the side of a storehouse, while he turned his slow, wondering gaze, now on the steamer, shrilly singing herself to sleep in her berth, now on the almost deserted packet. Uncle Lisha stood still a moment, then caught his wife’s arm with one hand while with the other he pointed to the newly revealed figure.

“Good airth an’ seas, Jerushy, ef there hain’t Jozeff Hill,” he cried joyfully; and in the next breath roared so loudly that all eyes were turned toward him, “Jozeff, Jozeff Hill, come here!” while Aunt Jerusha, too shaken with surprise and joy to speak, could only beckon frantically.

Hearing his name called, Joseph Hill stepped

hesitatingly forward a little, then stared about him on either hand and behind, till at last, with dawning recognition, he became aware of the two figures on the canal-boat and quickened his steps. "Why, ef 't hain't, — no 't hain't nuther, — yis, 't is tuther, Sam Hill! Uncle Lisher an' Aunt Jerushy!" he said in bewildered joy, and then was shaking hands with both old friends at once across the low gunwale of the boat.

"Git aboard, git aboard," cried Uncle Lisha, changing the hand-shaking to a lusty pull, "an' then we c'n be kinder socierble."

"Wal, no," said Joseph, carefully examining the narrow space between the boat and the wharf, "guess I don't need no board; seem's 'ough I c'd step right on t' the boat. It won't tip, will it?" he asked, as he stepped carefully on deck. "An' naow, where did you come from, an' why did n't you seddaown an' write you was comin' 'fore you started, so 's 't some on us could ha' met you, hey?"

"Why, hain't you met us, Jozeff? Wal, what more's wantin'? But you don't say Samwill never got nary letter?"

"Nary letter, that is tu say, not 'thin tew, three mont's; I d' know, mebby 'tain't more 'r tew mont's, an' it's on'y jest a happen-so 'at I'm here. I come daown wi' a lhud o' sawed spreuce shingle fer Morrison, an' 's long 's I hed tu stay

over night and hed n't nothin' tu du, thet is, nothin' pertic'lar, I thought I'd come daown an' kinder see the shippin' an' things. No more idee o' seein' you 'an I hed o' seein' — wal, Noer an' his wife on the ark, I don't b'lieve I hed. But I'm gladder tu see you 'n I would them, a dumb sight. An' naow 'f you c'ld ride on a hay-riggin', I've got buffalos an' blankits, I c'n take you right hum, tu-morrer."

"Good airth an' seas, we c'ld ride on a stun-boat 'at was goin' tu Danvis, an' glad o' the chance. But le' 's go daown int' the cabin where it's more comfortabler."

"Why, yis," Joseph assented, "'f you'd rather go daown suller 'n tu stay on the ruff, I'd jest 's livs, I do' know but I hed, though I du kinder spleen agin gittin' nigher the water. I got sunk in a ol' she boat oncte, clear the hull len'th o' my laigs."

"Where on airth did you find water deep enough?" Uncle Lisha asked with a chuckle as he glanced at his friend's short nether limbs and led the way into the cabin. The strange interior, with its tier of berths, its many chairs, and its long vista of carpeted floor, filled Joseph with astonishment.

"An' haow be you?" he inquired when he regained coherent speech. "Do' know but I ast you, but don't seem 's 'ough I did. Fact on 't is,

meetin' you so unexpected put me all abaout so I did n't scarcely know which eend my head was on."

They in their turn asked him much faster than he in his slow, undecided way could well answer, first, concerning the welfare of every friend and neighbor, and then, what events, public and private, had lately stirred the placid current of Danvis life. So they sat talking for an hour, when an irrepressible drowsiness made them aware it was late bedtime, and Joseph arose to go. Still talking the two groped their way to the deck, and Uncle Lisha saw him safely on the deserted wharf. There Joseph lingered to repeat his promise to come for them with his wagon "jest as soon arter breakfus as he could hitch up," and then plodded away to his lodgings.

The sounds of human voices and footsteps had dropped out of the night and the continual dull thunder of the Falls alone pervaded it as the old voyagers climbed into their berths for the last time, and presently fell into a more restful sleep than had come to them for many a night, for now they were almost home, and assured of the well-being of their friends.

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CHAPTER III.

HOME AGAIN.

JOSEPH HILL must have had a late breakfast and been a long time harnessing his horses, for the morning was far spent when he made his serene appearance, which had for some time been heralded as with the rattle of drums by the clatter of his hay wagon.

At last they were fairly set forth on the final stage of their journey. The little city was behind them, the roar of the cataract becoming fainter and fainter on their ears, and before them arose, ever a little nearer, their own mountain, towering into the drift of clouds. The gusty south wind blew so chilly that Uncle Lisha drew his bell-crowned beaver well down upon his ears and buttoned closer his many-caped drab surtout, and Aunt Jerusha, muffled in a melon hood and blue camlet cloak, with a buffalo skin tucked about her, was none too warm. Withal they were unmercifully jolted, tumbled now together, now apart, on the board seat which they often could only keep by hard holding. Yet in spite of any discomfort, their old hearts grew lighter with

every shortening furlong of their homeward way. They were continually shouting inquiries to Joseph and he shouting back disjointed answers above the din of the wagon, all together making an uproar of voices and clatter that might have alarmed neighborhoods less accustomed to such sounds.

They were impatient of every delay; when Joseph would halt a moment to pass a few words with some teamster that they met, he was reminded by a hint that the day was waning. They would not waste time in stopping to eat lunch, but ate as they bounced along the rough road. If the jolting sometimes cheated the opened jaws of an expected, gyrating mouthful, these old people partook with the appetite of children of the good, home-cooked fare that Maria Hill had bountifully provided for her husband's refreshment.

"These 'ere fried cakes is complete," Uncle Lisha said, as he captured another doughnut from the dodging pail and gave it to his wife.

"Yes," she said, regarding it with benign approval, "they be proper good, an' Marier twists 'em jest as she useter. Taste better 'n them raound things wi' a hole in the middle 'at some folks makes;" and Uncle Lisha understood that their son's wife was as good as named by this general term.

"Them was invented fer folks 'at goes afoot tu kerry on a string er string 'em on a fish pole er a gun berril, an' they 're raal handy," he explained.

"I don't keer," she answered, "I don't wanter be a-tryin' tu stay my stomerk wi' holes. Gi' me solid victuals."

But once Uncle Lisha did call a halt. They had satisfied their hunger and were brushing the crumbs from their garments when they entered the hill country, where a cold mountain brook braided the strands of its clear current along the roadside, frequently crossing from one to the other beneath rude wooden bridges.

"Whoa, Jozeff," he shouted, as his delighted gaze returned from roving up evergreen slopes and climbing rocky peaks, to rest upon the sparkling water, "le' me git aout. It's three year sen' I hed a drink o' what you might call water, an' I'm drier 'n a graven image. Naow I'm goin' tu ha' some." As he spoke he clambered down from the rear of the wagon, and waddled like a thirsty duck to the brookside. Carefully setting his hat upon a stone he got upon his hands and knees and drank long and eagerly from a pebble-bottomed pool, while the bubbles went to wreck upon his nose and sprinkled his face with unheeded spray.

"Ah-h-h," he sighed, raising himself a little to

regain his breath; "that squenches me clean tu the soles o' my boots;" and again he set himself to lessening the volume of the brook. "Naow, Jerushy," said he, as he got upon his feet and wiped his face with the ample bandanna that he stowed in his hat crown, "gi' me the kiver o' that tin pail an' I'll treat ye."

He passed the brimming pail cover over to his wife, while Joseph, casting a glance down stream, remarked:

"Why, Uncle Lisher, I b'lieve you've dranked the brook dry. Seem's 'ough I c'd see the traouts a-kickin' on the gravel daown yender."

"Like's not, Jozeff; I had a thirst 'at was wuth ten dollars in money, an' I've squenched it. Why, good airth an' seas, Jozeff, what they call water aout West is wet, an' some kind o' fish live in 't, an' you c'n wash you in 't arter a fashion, but when you come tu drinkin' on 't, you haf tu make it intu tea, er mix it wi' whiskey, — but it spiles the whiskey. Wal, le's be gittin' along. I'm in a hurry tu git hum, an' I swan, I'm a good min' tu set on the front seat so's tu git there quicker."

They were nearing their own township, and the landscape was becoming more and more familiar. The forlorn aspect of the naked trees and fields, tawny with dead grass or stubble or black with furrows of fall ploughing, did not di-

minish the interest of the travelers in every feature of the landscape, for unlike Joseph, who had seen it all so lately as yesterday, they scanned eagerly every farm and homestead, recognizing every old landmark and discovering every change.

"That ort tu be the Johns place," said the old man after a long look at a farmstead that had come into view; "but somehaow it don't look nat'ral. Why, 'f Johns hain't ben a-buildin' on him a haouse. Who 'd ever a thought o' him duin' that, tighter 'n the bark tu a tree, an' yit never had nothin' tu du nothin' with. An' 'f he hain't ben cuttin' off half his sugar-place, the dumb fool. I'd never thought o' Johns duin' that."

"Ol' Mr. Johns died las' year, er year afore, mebbly; I d' know," Joseph explained, speaking over his shoulder. "Abner heired it all, an' he 's cuttin' consid'able of a swath with the ol' man's prop'ty."

"Ah-h-h, that 'caounts for it," the old man said; "most allers the way. Ol' folks pinchin' an' savin' for young folks tu squander. So poor ol' Johns is dead. You don't say. Wal, wal, an' hed tu leave all his savin's. I uster shoe-make fer him, an' he 'd allers hev his'n an' his wife's an' boy's boots an' shoes made a size tew small t' save luther."

“Naow don’t, Lisher,” his wife expostulated mildly; “he’s dead an’ done wi’ boots an’ shoes.”

“An’ I hain’t no daoubt it’s a comfort tu him t’ git red o’ the expense.”

“Lisher Peggs! Hain’t you ’shamed? Prob-erbly he’s a-wearin’ goold shoes.”

“Not by a jugful! Ketch him a-wearin’ aout goold shoes a-pluggin’ raound the streets o’ the new Jerrus’hum! If he’s got any sech, he’s ker-ryin’ ’em ’n under his arm.” Willing to turn the conversation, he exclaimed, “See them critters,” pointing to a long straggling flock of crows that, close above the tree-tops of the Johns sugar-place, staggered southward in slow, laborious flight against the buffeting wind; “but nex’ spring they’ll be as glad as we be tu git back here, an’ gether the crow tax an’ pull corn an’ raise hob an’ their young uns an’ git shot at. An’ here we be to the top o’ the Johns Hill, an’ there’s ol’ ’Tater Hill an’ the Hump, julluk ol’ frien’s a-risin’ up tu welcome us, not a mite al-tered nor a day older tu look at. I hope there hain’t no livin’ frien’s changed no more.”

At the thought of such possibilities a shade of sadness touched his radiant face. “The Hump’s got his white cap on,” pointing to the snow-sheathed helmet of the majestic mountain, for a moment disclosed by a rift of the driving clouds.

“ ‘Time your ’taters was dug,’ says he. An’ by thunder, I begin tu git the smell o’ the balsams an’ spreuces. Good airth an’ seas, I c’ld holler an’ I c’ld sing, an’ I’m a dumb good minter,” his heavy voice increasing to a roar that threatened something alarming if it should rise to greater volume.

“ Lisher Peggs, du fer land’s sake behave. Folks ’ll think you ’re bein’ brung home crazy.”

“ Let ’em think,” shouted he; “ ’t won’t hurt ’em none. I’m goin’ tu. Hooray! Sing, Jerushy, sing, I tell you.

“ ‘Come, Philander, le’ ’s be a-marchin’,
Ev’ry one his treu love a-sarchin’;
Chuse your treu love, now or never,
See that you don’t chuse no other.
Fol de rol de fol de rol de day.’ ”

Aunt Jerusha could not forbear adding her quavering voice to his roaring refrain, and then, with tears on her wrinkled cheeks, laughed hysterically, exclaiming, “ What tew ol’ fools we be.”

Joseph laughed in enjoyment of their exuberant happiness and hummed to himself a bit of the old song with some intention of adding his voice if they should strike up again. Then urging on his horses the wagon went rattling down the long hill at a pace that jolted all the tunefulness out of Lisha’s voice, while his hat, already

shaken down to the bridge of his nose, threatened presently to quite extinguish his utterance. Carefully shoving the cherished beaver upward with both hands till he regained sight of his surroundings, he remarked in a quieter tone, "There 's the Dan'l Perkins place jest as it was when I see it last."

"Why, land o' Goshen, so it is," cried Aunt Jerusha; "an' Mis' Perkins has got her milk things aout sunnin' this claoudy day. Raises sunflaower seeds to feed her turkeys on jest 's she allers did. See what a sight o' stalks in the garden. They must ha' looked harnsome when they was in blow. But I 'd leetle ruther feed turkeys corn for me t' eat. Ily things sunflaower seeds be. An' there 's the turkeys goin' t' rhust on the ridge o' the ruff, jest as c'ntented 's if day arter t'-morrer warn't Thanksgiving'. I wish 't Mis' Perkins er him 'd come aou'-door, I du hanker so tu see someb'dy 't I know. But there 's the ol' yaller dawg;" as a stiff-legged old dog came waddling down the footpath toward the road, asthmatically and mechanically performing his self-appointed duty of barking at every passing team; having accomplished which, he waddled back to the house, congratulating himself with labored wags of his rigid tail. "I c'n see faces in the winders, but I can't tell 'em. Why on airth don't some on 'em come aou'-door? But

I s'pose they don't know who we be!" sighed Aunt Jerusha, again looking forward, after painfully twisting her neck to keep the house longer in view.

"Tew more hills an' you'll see hausen and folks 'nough 't you know," said her husband cheerfully, "ef 't ain't got tu be tew dark by then. An' there's a hoss, colored and gaited kinder famil'ar," he continued, while his eyes became fixed on a sleek, black horse that was soberly coming down the hill which they were ascending. "Good airth an' seas, Jerushy, it 's aour ol' Bob an' that aire big John Dart 'at bought him, a-drivin' on him;" and in the next minute he said as the teams met, "Wal, ol' Bob, haow be ye, ye tarnal ol' critter? Don't ye know yer own folks?" while the old horse pricked his ears at the sound of the unmistakable, familiar voice.

"Whoa, Jozeff, I got to git aout a minute."

Joseph, never loth to stop, pulled up his horses, and the old man, getting to the ground with clumsy haste, went round to Bob, caressing the white nose which was thrust into his horny hand, and would have kissed it if there had been no one to see him. "Johnswort hain't made your ol' white nose sore this year, hes it? You know your own folks, don't you? Slick 's an otter, hain't ye, an' hain't growed ol' a mite, not a mite; hes he, Jerushy?" as he patted his way along

the old horse's glossy, black sides toward the wagon and its occupant, to whom he now stretched forth his hand.

"Haow dy du, Mr. Dart, you an' ol' Bob looking fustrate?"

"Oh, tol'ble," responded the giant, shaking the old man's hand with a painful grip that for its heartiness was heroically borne; "but pinin' away to a cartload; and be you well, and you, Mis' Peggs? Kinder tuckered aout trav'lin'? Putty tough on folks o' your age trav'lin' so fur. You never ort tu gone West, an' I 'm mighty glad y' 're back in ol' V'mont agin;" meantime turning his horse's head so that Aunt Jerusha's outstretched hand could reach it.

"Thank ye, Mr. Dart," said she in a trembling voice, as she stroked Old Bob's white nose and patted his glossy neck. "Yis, I 'm well, an' I hope I see you the same."

"I 've got tu hev me some boots made," Dart said to Uncle Lisha as the old man clambered into the wagon, "an' when I c'n git a couple sides o' luther, I shall be over," holding up one enormous foot to show the necessity of such ample provision; "an' then, you must tell me all abaout the West an' ev'ybody aout there."

"Wal, if his feet be big" chuckled Uncle Lisha as they rode away, "a kiver fur his heart 'ould hafter be made on the same kind o' last."

Joseph urged his horses forward, but before they began to climb the second hill the shadows of evening were thick in the hollows and creeping to the hilltops in gathering volume, till the bounds of gray woods and tawny fields grew undefinable in the even hue of dusk, and the outlines of the wooded ridges were blurred against the sombre sky. When the promised point of observation was reached, the valley of Danvis lay before them in the thick darkness of early night-fall, the gloom relieved only by the broken chain of house-lights that here and there defined the lines of highways, and in a thicker cluster of links marked the place of the village.

A moment after they had reached the hilltop, the expectant silence of the pair was broken by Lisha in a tone of disappointment. "Wal, I swan, we can't see nuthin'. It's darker 'n a wolf's maouth. But I c'n pick aout the lights. There's the forge an' Hamner's an' the store, an' there's the blacksmith's shop, an' there the lower rhud goes off north. An' the fust haouse on it is Darkter Stun's, an' then comes Gove's — wonder ef that's Peltier pokin' aout tu the barn wi' a lantern — an' there's Lovel's, where we're goin', an' there, 'baout a hundred rods funder north, ort tu be aour lights shinin', one in the shop 'n' 'nuther in the haouse part; but they won't never be lit ag'in, I s'pose. I wish 't they

was an' these tew humless an' humly ol' creeturs was in the light on 'em, she a-fussin' raound her kitchin, him a-whackin' away 't his lapstun, all his frien's a-loafin' raound, smokin' an' tellin' stories. But they won't be, never."

"Why, yes, Lisher, you'll shoemake agin an' hev yer frien's comin' an' visitin' jes 's they useter," said his wife, her voice modulated to the tender tone with which she would have comforted a child.

"Yis, yis, I'll shoemake, but it won't be as it useter was. Ol' times don't never come ag'in. Ye look back an' ye look forrad tu 'em, but they never ketch up tu ye, nor meet ye; ho, hum!"

"Ain't that light tu Solon Briggs's?" asked his wife, recalling him to the locating of homesteads.

"An' there 's yourn, Jozeff, and Joel Bartlett hain't a-hidin' his'n under a ha'-bushel, for there it shines afore all men. An' there 's Pur'n'ton's, an', le' me see, why that aire leetle glim o' light off t' the left is Antwine's. Ev'ry identical haouse lit up but aourn. But we're alive an' kickin' yit," he added more cheerfully; and so he completed the round of his mental visitation, during which Joseph had contributed items of uncertain information as each neighbor was named.

"An' so yer father's hel' his own tol'ble well, hes he, Jozeff? I swan tu man, I dread meetin'

on him, for he 'll gi' me Hail Columby fer comin' back wus 'n he did fer goin' away. But ef I c'n on'y git him tu takin' Ti, he 'll le' me alone. He hes spells o' takin' Ti yit, don't he, Jozeff?"

"Wal, yis," Joseph answered with a tone of resignation. "Reg'lar oncte a week, an' I don't know but oftener; seem 's 'ough. Sometimes I most wish him an' Ethan Allen hed n't never took the pleggid ol' fort, seems 's 'ough I did a'most."

Presently, when they could see on the steps of the store, which was also the post-office, the expectant group awaiting the mail, staring into the gloom out of the dim light shed through the dusty panes and the sprinkled rays of a tin lantern, they turned the corner and took the road northward, familiar even in the darkness. Mingled with the gusty roar of the wind, they heard the note of a hound swelling and falling among the rugged corrugations of the nearest hill, a persistent, plaintive voice, as sad and lonely as the cry of some perturbed spirit, doomed to nightly wandering.

"That saounds julluk Sam's ol' Drive," said Uncle Lisha, after giving an attentive ear to the sound. "I hope Samwill's got in, fer I wanter come kerslap ont' the hull caboodle on 'em, an' s'prise 'em all tu oncte. There," as the sudden report of a gun was blown short and echoless, down the wind, "there goes his gun, tu call the

haoun' off. Drive slow, Jozeff, an' give him a chance tu git hum ahead on us, an' don't make no n'ise."

To drive slower was almost to stop, but Joseph accomplished the feat and still made some progress. They were nearing the Lovel homestead and could see the lights of the kitchen windows shining across the dooryard and fading out at the roadside, in shadows of the naked lilacs. Then they heard the scraping of feet on the doorstep; the door opened and a brighter bar of light gleamed forth, streaked with the longer shadows of two long legs, as Sam's tall form was briefly shown in silhouette against the bright interior, then disappeared, with the old hound pushing in after his master.

When the wagon stopped in front of the house, unheard by the inmates in the uproar of the wind, the travelers saw a woman's shadow passing to and fro across the half-curtain of the window and knew it was Huldah's, and by the clatter of the dishes that she was laying her husband's supper.

"Good minter holler tu her tu set tew more plates," Uncle Lisha whispered, smothering a chuckle in an asthmatic wheeze.

"Come, Jerushy, pile aout 's spry as ye can," he continued, getting to the ground and reaching up his hands to help, while he braced himself to aid her descent. "Bear yer hull heft on me.

Why, ye don't weigh no more 'n a straw hat. There, yer horses 'll stan', Jozeff, an' naow you go ahead an' ask them 'f they c'n keep a couple o' poor leetle young uns 't you picked up on the rhud, over night."

"Tew young uns? Oh, Sam Hill," Joseph ejaculated, and they could hear the loose-bladed jack-knife and wooden pocket-combs rattling in his pocket with the suppressed laughter that shook him.

"Yis, young uns; an' tell 'em they hain't no parents an' hain't hed no supper, an' don't ye laugh. An' be quick, fer I can't wait," giving the last injunction as Joseph reached the door, and they halted close behind him.

Joseph entered without knocking, after the neighborly fashion of Danvis, and the door closed behind him as he uttered the salutation, —

"Evenin'."

"Evenin'," came Sam's hearty answer from where he was stooping over the cradle of his sleeping baby, and they heard Huldah's cheery welcome and Timothy Lovel's voice, as he came in his stockings, to set a chair for the guest.

"Consarn him," Uncle Lisha whispered when he heard the loud sigh of satisfaction which announced that Joseph had seated himself. "Naow he'll set an' set tu all etarnity 'fore he gits tu what he 's arter."

“Wal, ben huntin’, hey?” Joseph drawled.
“Git one, did you?”

“Yes, got one,” was the answer.

“Not when I heerd ye shoot, sence dark?”

“No, callin’ Drive off then. Shot one fox, ’fore noon, an’ started another, but he run the hull len’t’h o’ Hawg’s Back an’ never come back till dark.”

(“Consarn the dumb fox, he ’ll be a-huntin’ on him half the night,” Uncle Lisha growled under his breath, half angry Sam should be talking of such trivial matters with his old friends so near.)

“I heerd the dawg an’ I heerd ye shoot,” Joseph put in at the first break in the story of the day’s hunt, “’s I was comin’ ’long jest gittin’ back f’m V’gennes; went daown wi’ a lhud o’ shingles for Morrison, yist’d’y.”

“Did you stop t’ the office?” Sam asked with sudden interest. “No? Wal, I mus’ go over arter I git suthin’ t’ eat an’ see ’f the’ hain’t a letter f’m Uncle Lisher.” (The old people silently exchanged punches of each other’s ribs.) “It ’s cur’us he hain’t writ. I hope the’ hain’t nothin’ happened.”

(“The’ will suthin’,” Uncle Lisha whispered hoarsely. “I ’ll go in an’ shake the paigs aouten Joe Hill’s boots, ’f he don’t up an’ tell his leetle lie pooty quick.”)

“I was comin’ ’long kinder mawdrit fer me,

over beyend the Johns place, I b'lieve it was, I do' know but 't was this side o' Perkinses, I ruther guess it was. Anyways, the' 's a but'nut-tree, an' onderneath that but'nut-tree, the' was tew pooty leetle young uns," said Joseph, raising his voice, "as ever you see; ("Dumb your picter," whispered Uncle Lisha, shaking his fist at the door;) he a-crackin' but'nuts wi' a stun, an' a-feedin' on 'em tu her, an' there they sot, she a-cryin' an' him a-crackin', an' they tol' me, I don't know but what they lied, but they tol' me they had n't got nothin' tu eat, an' hed n't no father an' mother all day. ("Joe Hill, I never tol' you tu tell no sech a lie," the old man said in a smothered growl.) They'd come f'm way off somewher's, an' they 're goin' 'way back here somewher's, tu some o' the' folks er suthin', an' I jest fetched 'em along. An' I come in tu see 'f you could n't kinder keep 'em over night, 'cause ye see we 're kinder full t' aour haouse, an' M'ri', she hain't got what ye might call tough yit, an' think, says I, as I come along, I'll ask Samwill an' Huldry tu take 'em in."

"Be they a-settin' aout in your wagin all this time?" Sam asked sharply. "Why on airth don't ye fetch 'em right in? Poor leetle cubs, a-shiverin' aou'-door whilst we 're a-gabbin' in here comf'table. Fetch 'em right in," and he made a quick movement toward the door.

Huldah stayed him with a hand upon his arm, and, with an anxious glance toward the cradle, asked hurriedly, "They hain't got whoopin' cough ner nothin', hev they, Mr. Hill? The' 's whoopin' cough an' measles raound."

"Wal, no, Huld'y," Joseph drawled. "They 're healthy as boneset, an' come tu think on 't, they hain't so turrible leetle. I do' know but what they 're pooty nigh growed up."

"Joseph Hill, what on this livin' airth be you talkin' 'baout? Be you crazy or hev you ben drinkin'?" Huldah asked in a sharp tone of mingled vexation and astonishment, while Sam fixed a bewildered stare upon their visitor.

"Good land o' Goshen," cried Aunt Jerusha, "I can't stan' sech foolin' no longer," and with trembling, impatient hands fumbling at the looped iron door-handle, she raised the latch and entered.

With a yearning for womanly touch and sympathy that could find no expression in words, brushing past Sam, she went with the quick, jerky step of an agile old woman and with arms outspread, straight to Huldah, and the fresh young face and the other, wrinkled with age, were hidden together beneath the melon hood.

"An' naow," quavered Aunt Jerusha, withdrawing her face a little from Huldah's, and eagerly, though with tearful eyes, searching the room, "where 's that baby?"

Uncle Lisha had entered close behind her, and roaring, "Good airth an' seas," which it was good to hear again, was shaking hands with every one, at last even with Joseph and Aunt Jerusha, never letting go a hand till the possessor of that member was dragged to where the next was awaiting his grasp. The old hound, awakened by the unusual commotion, scrambled out backward from his place beneath the stove, with a prodigious clatter of his stiff toes, and, after sniffing at Uncle Lisha's knee, set up a bellow of welcome and belabored every one's legs with sounding blows of his tail. The baby, aroused by the noise, swelled it with his own lusty outcry while Aunt Jerusha fluttered back and forth, hovering now over the child, now over the stove, and lamenting her hands were too cold to take him. At last by lullabys and commands, quiet was partially restored, Aunt Jerusha was divested of her cloak and hood by Huldah's ready hands, Uncle Lisha was laboriously unsheathed from his tight-sleeved surtout by the united exertions of Sam and Joseph, and Timothy Lovel stood aloof, an interested spectator, helpful in holding the bell-crowned beaver.

When the travelers' chest, bandbox, and blue cotton umbrella were brought in, the men drew their chairs to the stove and set themselves to the business of visiting, and the two women exchanged whispered confidences while the elder

made excursive advances toward the baby's acquaintance and the younger busied herself with preparation of an ampler supper. Joseph Hill would not stay to sup with them. He told M'ri', he said, 'at he'd be hum to supper an' she'd be a-keepin' on 't fer him; so promising to bring his father and wife over soon to see their old friends, after his lingering fashion, he took himself away.

The tall clock that in former years had placidly ticked away innumerable sad and happy moments of these old people's lives, had escaped their notice till, with a wheezy purr, it began deliberately to strike the hour. Uncle Lisha checked a half-spoken word to listen. "Jerushy, du you hear the ol' clock?" he cried; and the two went over to it, fondly examining its dull, brazen face, and opening the narrow door, displaying the ponderous weights so often coveted by Sam in his boyhood for the treasure of shot which they were said to hold.

"An' here 's suthin' else I wanter hev ye look at," said their host; and taking a candle he led them into the afterthought of builders known as a lean-to, whither Huldah followed, and Timothy Lovel came to stand in the doorway with an amused smile ready to flicker upon his quiet countenance.

There was revealed the old shoemaker's bench at a long, low window, beneath which was fas-

tened a folding wooden sconce with a candle in it, some familiar chairs, veterans with disabled legs, and the old shop's cracked stove. This familiar furniture, with some rolls of leather and a few blocks of unsplit pegs, gave the room, but for its unuse and cleanliness, much the appearance of the old shop. To complete the likeness there was only lacking a clutter of lasts and tools, an accumulation of rubbish, and an odor of tobacco, mingled with the smell of leather that already pervaded it.

Even as it was, it gave the old man a thrill of delight that nearly took his breath away. He could only gasp, "Good airth an' seas," and plumped himself into the leathern seat as if he had again found rest and peace. Instinctively he stretched forth his hand to the place where his tools should be. Looking up at Sam and Huldah with a smile more expressive of thanks than any words could be, he said: —

"Ol' times can't never come back ag'in, but it seems as 'ough this, wi' a leetle seasonin', would eenamost fetch 'em."

CHAPTER IV.

AMONG OLD FRIENDS.

IT was with devout thankfulness that Uncle Lisha and his wife found that the time which had seemed so long to them had wrought few changes among old friends and familiar scenes. If they could but have taken up the broken thread of their far-spent life in their old brown house and shop, the measure of present contentment would have been full. Yet they inherited, in some measure, the adaptability to change which has come, through restless generations of pioneers, to the Yankee race, and they were content to be the welcome inmates of the Lovel's hospitable home.

It was pleasant to be so near the old home, and it comforted them to know that human life had quite gone out of it when they forsook it. The capricious November weather having fallen into an unexpected mood of mildness on the day after their arrival, they walked down to the old place and found it little changed since they had last seen it, except by the air of complete desertion that pervaded it.

They pushed open the unlatched door and en-

tered with an awed sense of being the ghosts of their former selves, yet apparitions that would affright no one, nor scarcely disturb the squirrels that hoarded their stores in the garret, nor interrupt the woodpecker's tattoo on the gable clapboards, nor awaken the woodchuck from his long nap under the flooring of the shop. Upon this floor, that was indented with his own and innumerable other heel-marks, the old cobbler saw the rubbish of leather scraps almost as he had left it, but for the blue mould that had gathered on it, quite overpowering with mustiness the odor of tannin and wax that once pervaded the dingy little den.

Thence the two went into the house part, in which their married life had begun, where children had been born to them, where they had toiled and grown weary and rested, whose low-browed rooms were hallowed by days and years of happiness and sorrow and the slow healing of bereavement.

In the kitchen, from the blank fireplace, with its ashes of the last fire they had kindled there, already showing a green film of moss, the crane stretched out to them its naked, sooty arm, whether interrogating or supplicating, seemed not clear to them. Out of the smoky ceiling the empty iron hooks reached toward them as if asking the old burdens of crooknecks and dried

apples. Amid them, the empty stovepipe hole stared down at the unworn patch of floor the winter stove had covered, in silent reproach. Their own hushed voices sounded hollow and unnatural.

In vain they strove to rehabilitate the rooms in imagination with their old furniture; they could not make them homelike nor bring any warmth of their old life to dispel the pervading smell of unused, unpainted wood, except once when Aunt Jerusha opened the kitchen cupboard and there came out of it a faint, embalmed odor of loaf cake and gingerbread that made them both hungry.

Groping in the furthest corner of the upper shelf for some forgotten relic of the old life, her fingers touched some soft, yielding fabric, and then drew forth a rudely fashioned little rag doll, whose ink-marked features had almost faded into the dingy hue of the homespun linen face. With fond, speechless wonder they looked upon it for a moment, and with one accord went over to the east window, where, with eyes dimmed with something more than age, through the haze of the calm autumnal day, they saw the scarlet sumach bobs shining out of the wilderness of the little hillside graveyard where they buried their only daughter, in the long ago of her childhood. For a brief space the deserted house seemed again to

be their home, and the scurry of the squirrels overhead, the patter of a little child's feet. Thankful to leave it with the impression of such a presence, they went out, closing the door reverently behind them.

They went down the tangled, untrodden path to the little gate, that was still held shut with a chain weighted with a rusty plow-point. Here they were suddenly confronted by Gran'ther Hill, as erect as when they had last seen him, though leaning a little more heavily on the staff that so often emphasized his words.

"You tarnal ol' critters," he whistled hoarsely through a smile as grim as toothless jaws could show, while he stretched forth a cordial hand to them. "Be ye a tryin' to ressurreck yourselves, er what be ye duin' a hantin' raound here where ye'd ortu staid? Did n't I tell ye, Lisher Peggs, 'at the rattlesnaikes 'ould chaw ye, an' the fever 'n' aig 'ould shake ye, an' the Injins 'ould skelp ye till ye'd wish 't ye'd staid where ye was? Hey? Did n't I? Did n't I know? An' don't you know now 't I knowed? What?" as Uncle Lisha attempted to explain that he had not been beset by any such enemies. "You tell me th' did n't no snaikes bite ye? You could n't feel 'em a chawin' yer ol' so' luther hide. But they did. An' I'll bate it killed 'em, erless they got sick o' the taste on yer, which I should n't blame 'em

none. Yis, ye did hev fever 'n' aig, an' did n't know it f'm the nat'ral rattlin' o' your ol' bones. An' ef the Injins did n't skelp ye 't was cause they got sick o' the job an' gin it up. Take off yer hat an' lemme see what luck they hed a peelin' yer ol' bal' skelp. Wal, then what did ye come back fer? Seddaown on that lawg 'f ye hain't got 'bove sech settin'. They du say the' hain't no lawgs on them perraries, an' tell me," and he seated himself on an elm trunk that years ago had defied Uncle Lisha's efforts to split it, and, with an impatient gesture, waved his friends to a place beside him.

Aunt Jerusha dusted a place for herself with her checked copperas and white home-made handkerchief, while Uncle Lisha carefully parted the tails of his coat and sat down.

"Ahem," he cleared his throat to explain. "The fact on 't is, I got sick on 't an' so did Jerushy."

"You — got — sick — on 't!" cried the veteran with ineffable contempt, "an' sneaked off. Wal, I'm 'shamed on ye, fer disgracin' yer State. A Green Maountain Boy a-gettin' sick on 't an' a-sneakin' back hum'. Why, man alive, don't ye s'pose we got sick on 't tu Ben'n't'n an' almighty sick on 't, tu, wi' the Hessians a-pepperin' on us, an' the sun a-blazin' daown hotter 'n To-phit? But we did n't sneak off. No, sir, we

stuck her aout, an' we licked 'em. That's haow we done in them times."

"Lemme see," said Uncle Lisha, searching his memory for some missile to cast at his contemner, "haow was 't tu Hubbar't'n? Yis, an' tu Ticonderogue when Burgwine come?" triumphantly hurling a second question before the first had fairly struck.

The veteran glared at him a moment before he growled hoarsely, "Lisher Peggs, be you a nat'ral borned idjit, er don't ye know nothin'? Don't ye know 'at Hale sneaked off wi' his rig'-ment, an' left Warner an' Francis tu stan' the hull bilin' o' Hessians wi' their'n, an' they was tew many fer us tu stan' ag'in', an' we hed tu run in spite o' Warner's cussin', which it was nigh 'baout as hot as the Hessians' firin', an' Francis was daown, an' Warner run hisself, an' when Seth Warner run 't was time fer most folks tu scratch gravel. Hubbar't'n, hump, 'f I'd stayed there I'd ben killed, an' who'd there ben tu fight tu Ben'n't'n? An' 'baout Ti," he continued more calmly, "why, ye see, Sinclair let 'em git their cannern top o' Sugar Loaf, 't wa'n't none o' my duin's, an' then the' wa'n't nothin' for 't, but tu clear aout, er git took, an' the' hain't no use o' that."

"Jes' so," said Uncle Lisha, beaming triumphantly on his adversary, "an' no more the' wa'n't

no use in us a-stayin' aout West an' dyin', jest aout'n stinkin' pride. An' so we gin up sensible, jest as you did tu Hubbar't'n an' Ti."

"An' ye done almighty well, Lisher, so ye did," said Gran'ther Hill, heartily, "an' I'm glad ye hed sense 'nough tu. But," he added, emphasizing each word with a tap of his staff on Lisha's shoulder, "don't fergit I tol' ye so."

"Day 'fore yeste'day," Uncle Lisha said, turning the conversation into a pleasanter channel, "we come past ol' Fort Ti, an' it most seemed 's 'ough I could 'see you an' Ethan Allen an' 'mongst ye, a marchin' up to 't in the gray o' the mornin', an' a-takin' of it, though it don't look wuth a-takin' er a-keepin' naow."

"An' by the Lord Harry, you'd ort tu seen us," cried Gran'ther Hill, who at once began for an unnumbered time the recital of the exploit, in which he took greater pride than in any other wherein he had borne a part. "It's many a year sen I seen the ol' fort," he said in conclusion, long before which his listeners had grown restless, "an' they say it has gone tu rack an' ruin, which it is a shame tu the nation we took it for an' gin it tu. But this grubbin', tradin' generation hain't no pride in things 't was did, in the days when the' was men. They'll brag on 't Fo'th o' Julys an' 'lections as ef they'd did it the'selves, but they hain't no pride in nothin' but

makin' money an' gittin' 'lected, an' 'll fence sheep pasters an' onderpin haousen wi' the' gran'thers' gravestones 'f they're handier 'n cobblestuns an' querries, damn 'em."

"Le 's gwup tu Samwill's," said Uncle Lisha, breaking the silence that followed this outbreak of indignation. "He 's got some cider 't 's terrible good for the time o' year," and he arose to lead the way.

"You don't say?" cried Gran'ther Hill, getting to his feet with wonderful alacrity. "Wal, I guess I will, for I be got kinder dry talkin', an' it seems as 'ough a mug o' saound cider 'ould tech the dryest spot."

In his haste to put this cure for thirst to proof, he was presently leading his companions, stepping out briskly to the air of "The Road to Boston," produced by the violent outputting and indrawing of breath that now served for the whistle long since mustered out of his toothless jaws. The quickstep soon brought them to Sam's door, with Uncle Lisha scant of breath and mopping his brow with his bandanna, though Aunt Jerusha had borne the forced march wonderfully well.

The veteran beamed upon him a grim smile of doubtful approval. "You must ha' ben a good sojer, Lisher," he said. "You don't keep step wuth a soo markee, but ye never could ha' run ef you'd a wanted tu."

Entering, they found Sam stretching yesterday's fox-skin upon a board, while the baby, between his knees, played with the dangling brush.

"Mornin', Cap'n Hill," said Sam heartily; and Huldah came out of the pantry, brushing flour from her hands on her white baking apron, and offered one, rosy through its dusty bloom, to the ancient guest.

"Take a seat, Cap'n Hill," she said, shoving the great splint-bottomed chair toward him and cuffing the feathers of its patchwork cushion into hospitable softness. "How's all the folks up tu your haouse? your son's wife an' the child'n, be they well? Seddaown in the rockin' chair, Aunt Jerushy, an' Unele Lisher, you take t' other armchair. They're well, be they?"

"Well? Wal, I guess they be by the rumpus they make, wus'n a hull tribe o' Injins. M'rier stan's it better'n I could er would. By the Lord Harry, I wish 't I c'd bring up them young uns. Fust thing I'd skin 'em. Gi' me that boy o' yourn—I know he's a boy by his actions a touslin' that aire fox-tail; ef 't was a rhuster feather, he might be a gal—gi' me that aire boy, Huld'y Pur'n't'n, an' I'll make ye suthin' tu be praoud on. See the leetle sarpint wrastle that fox-tail, an' smell on 't's ef 't was a posy. He's got hunt in him, I tell ye, julluk a haoun' pup. It's tew bad tu hev him grow up a tarnal,

unmannered, consaited fool, all young uns does nowerdays, but he will 'f he hain't gin tu me. I don't know o' nob'dy else left fit tu bring up a young un tu lick 'em an' larn 'm 's they 'd ortu be."

"I do' know, Cap'n," said Sam, smiling proudly on his first-born and dragging him a little to and fro by the brush, still grasped by the chubby, dimpled hands; "I guess we don't want him skinned jest yet; he hain't prime."

Gran'ther Hill acknowledged the joke with a chuckle. "Don't ye wait till he sheds his fur, er the cub won't be wuth shucks. Come 'ere, bub," and he took from his pocket a steel tobacco box, bright with wear in spite of a mottle of rust specks. "Come 'ere an' see the pooty-pooty," shaking the box, which, with its inclosed bit of hard nail rod tobacco, made an inviting rattle.

The baby's blue eyes grew round with pleased wonder, and he tugged at the fox-skin to take it with him to the newly offered toy, but, when he could not, crept back between his father's knees.

"Jullook o' that," cried the old man, "he won't leggo a fox-skin for terbarker in a box 'at was in Ben'n't'n battle, an' was hit by a Hessian bullet, an' saved my laig, ef it did n't my life." And he exhibited a dent in the cover. "I tell ye that boy's a borned hunter. What ye named him, Sam? Gin him a good, short, hones' name

aouten no go betweenes, er hev ye named him all the names o' all yer relations, 'cordin' tu naowerdays fashin? Aour young uns was tellin' o' one o' them Noakes boys 'at goes tu school, 'at when the master ast his name up an' answered, 'Guy Azro Joab Jethro Uncle James Ferris Noakes.' What ye think o' thet fer a name? One good solid chunk o' fust name was 'nough fer Geo'ge Washin't'n an' Ethan Allen, an' Seth Warner an' Josier Hill, by thunder. But I most fergot my ar'nt. Naow, what I want 's a mug o' cider tu m'isen my mortal clay, which I've dried up, a-gabbin'."

"I gin him a invite, thinkin' he'd be welcome," said Uncle Lisha in an apologetic undertone.

"Why, sartainly," said Sam; "Huldy, won't you get me a pitcher whilst I light a light?"

"I did n't need no invite on'y tu know you hed it. When cider hain't free plunder tu neighbors, all the good ol' times must be gone by." He smacked his lips as he heard from the cellar the squeak of the tap, the responsive rush of the cider into the pitcher, running up the gamut from emptiness to fulness in a hospitable tune which, he remarked with satisfaction, was not cut short when the tap was re-driven, by a hollow sound portending drouthiness in the immediate future. After tasting the proffered glass with an

approving smack, he withheld his lips to bestow the ambiguous compliment that every Yankee is in due politeness bound to give his host's cider in every season from its sparkling youth to sour age.

“That aire 's mighty good cider for the time o' year.”

Warmed with a second glass, he looked over its rim at the baby still playing with the fox-skin. “A reg'lar borned hunter, julluk his father. I'd ortu take an' bring 'em both up an' larn 'em tu shoot, fer the'd ortu be some hunters a-growin' up. Hunters makes sojers, an' the'll be need on 'em sometime. It does beat all natur' what cussed foolish idees folks hes come tu hev abaout huntin' bein' low daown an' goo' fer nothin'. Don't they know 't huntin' was half folkses livin' in ol' times an' larnt 'em tu fight Injins as well as other varmints? When I was a boy, a boy went a-huntin' 's soon 's he could kerry a gun, an' hed tu rest it ag'in' a tree tu shoot, an' when the time come he was all ready tu be a sojer. Look a' Ethan Allen an' Seth Warner an' Peleg Sunderlan' an' Remember Baker an' Bob Cockrun an' —” straightening himself in his chair and striking his breast with his fist — “wal, I won't call no names, but look a' the hull bilin' o' Green Maountain boys, ev'y man jack on 'em a hunter by spells. Be they men

fer these creeturs tu stick up the'r new fashined noses at? Look a' the boys, yis, an' the growed up young fellers, naow. Don't half on 'em know one eend of a gun f'm t' other, an' turn aout tu trainin' wi' sticks an' brooms. S'pose the' come a war, where 'd we be? Er jest a wolf? I wisht tu the Lord the' would a wolf come an' kinder wake up the blasted folks. Guess they 'd find aout the's some use in knowin' haow tu shoot a gun."

"I 'm half thinkin', Cap'n Hill, the' is a wolf hengin' raound on the maountains. I 've seen some signs 'at looks that way," said Sam, fastening the stretched skin with the last nail.

"Sho'. Th' hain't nuther," Gran'ther Hill growled incredulously, "you would n't know a wolf sign 'f you 'd seen it."

"Wal, mebb'y," Sam admitted, "but I more 'n half b'lieve th' is."

"Wal, ef th' is, someb'dy's sheep 'll ketch it 'fore spring, fer the' hain't no deer. Ef he 'd on'y kill tew, three o' Joel Bartlett's, would n't th' be a-weepin' an' wailin' an' a-gnashin' o' teeth? An' him a-thinkin' a man wi' a gun on his shoulder 's goin' stret tu Tophet. Er 'f he 'd kill an ol' breedin' yoe fer yer father, Huld'y. He's turrible sot ag'in' huntin', an' thinks the devil owed him a gretch an' paid it in a huntin' son-in-law. My sakes, would n't it set 'em a-

hummin'?" He cackled a dry, cracked laugh as he looked out the window across the fields to the quiet homesteads and imagined the commotion into which the advent of a wolf would throw them. Suddenly the chuckle ceased, the senile mirthfulness of his visage faded into a blank stare of consternation.

"I swear," he whispered hoarsely to himself, but so loudly that other ears were reached, "ef there hain't thet Pur'n't'n womern a-comin' wi' her gal a-towin' of her. (I wish 't was the womern 'at got lost, an' they hed n't never faound her.) Wal, I got tu be a-goin'," he declared; and rising in flurried haste departed in spite of all hospitable entreaty, with as much precipitation as he had quitted the disastrous field of Hubbardton.

An abashed titter broke the brief interval of silence, and then Mrs. Purington entered, panting with the exertion of climbing the steep steps, with Sis, in the bashfulness of overgrown awkwardness, following close behind.

"Ef I hev got tu còme over here every tew, three days fer the hull endurin' days o' my life," she gasped in tones whose reproachfulness was emphasized by her labored breathing, "it does seem as ef someb'dy might stick some planks er slabs er suthin' int' the fences tu make it easier a-gettin' over. An' these 'ere back steps, it's

julluk climbin' a ladder. I should think, Samwill, 'at you might kinder slant 'em someways. It does seem as ef my limbs an' my breath was a-gettin' shorter ev'y day, an' it does seem as 'ough I could n't stan' it a-trapesin' over here much longer."

"Ef you'd holler er blow a horn when you was a-startin' I might go an' le' daown the fences for ye," Sam suggested cheerily, while he revolved plans for making the fences more impassable.

His mother-in-law acknowledged the suggestion by a sigh expressive of submission to continued injury, and, having somewhat recovered breath, waddled over to the newly arrived guests, whom she saluted with funereal solemnity.

"Haow du you du, Aunt Jerushy, an' haow du you du, Uncle Lisher? You hain't well, be ye, naow? You du look so wore aout an' tuckered, an' I p'sume tu say you're comin' daown wi' that aire Western fever 'at so many dies on. You'd ort tu go right tu bed, an' take suthin', some boneset tea er pennyrile er suthin'. I du wish 't I'd fetched over suthin', an' I would 'f I'd knowed you was a-lookin' so. But I do know 's I could ha' stood it tu ha' fetched anythin' but myself. Jest as soon 's I felt able arter I hearn you'd come, I tol' him I mus' come an' give ye a welcome an' make you feel tu hum,

'cause I knowed ye could n't help feelin' 't you was craowdin' in, an' I p'sume tu say it will on-convenience Huldah an' Samwill consid'able."

"'Tain't no sech a thing," cried Huldah, sharply, indignant and mortified. "They're jest as welcome as they c'n be, an' it's them 'at's duin' us a favor. An' they look jest as well as they did when they went away, an' we're so glad tu hev 'em back. Mother, you're allers an' forever a tewin'."

"But then," continued Mrs. Purington, serenely unmindful of this interruption, "it hain't proberble 'at at your age, you'll be spared much longer in this vale o' tears." With the air of having administered consolation to all concerned, she heaved a sigh of relief as she seated herself at the window and lapsed for a little while into silence, sadly regarding the old people who sat burning in speechless discomfort till Aunt Jerusha ventured to say:—

"The' can't nob'dy say 'at we come wi'out bein' ast. But," she added with a tremor of fervor in her voice, "the' don't nob'dy know but them 'at's tried it, haow we did wanter come. Ef they did, they would n't blame us."

"An' they don't," said Huldah, flashing an angry glance at her mother, and then, shutting her lips tightly together to keep back angrier words, she retreated into the pantry.

“Not nob’dy ’at ’s got any business tu,” Sam supplemented in his quiet drawl.

His father made a show of mending the fire, and went out on tiptoe for an armful of wood, having through long experience with Sam’s late-departed step-mother learned to employ the better part of valor, when a war of women’s words impended.

Mrs. Purington put her apron to her eyes and rocked herself from side to side in silent endurance of the injuries that she felt were being heaped upon her.

“I wanter know if this ’ere is Sis Pur’n’t’n?” Aunt Jerusha asked, lifting her spectacles and looking intently at the girl, who was now shielding her bashfulness behind her sister, coming to the stove with a pumpkin pie. “Wal, it does beat all haow she ’s growed. Clean up tu yer shoulder, Huldly, an’ favors you an’ her father. I ’m glad o’ that.” Mrs. Purington cut short a grieved snuffle with a sniff of contempt.

“So she does,” Uncle Lisha assented after a critical inspection through the round-eyed glasses which he had put on for this especial service; “but Huldly’s chunkeder built.”

“Yis, but Sis hain’t got her shape yit. I tell ye she’s feat’red and complected like the Pur’n’t’ns and not a mite like the Bordenses.” Mrs. Purington sniffed again, and, removing the apron

from her eyes, gazed through the window upon the outer world as if it alone interested her.

“Wal, Sis,” said Uncle Lisha, “hev ye ever went an’ got lost ag’in? What a carrummux you did make, tu be sure, a-gittin’ lost. But it was a mighty good job you did wi’out you ’re knowin’ ’t was the best you ever done,” and he beamed a kindly smile upon Sam and Huldah and the little girl, whose finding had brought them together.

Presently Mrs. Purington’s vacant stare became focused on some object outside, and she exclaimed in a tone expressive of awakened interest in present affairs : —

“Samwill Lovel, why, fer land’s sake, don’t ye cuddaown that aire lalock, er trim it up, er suth-in’, so ’s ’t folks c’n see the pass? Wal, goodness hev massy, if that aire Antwine Frenchman hain’t a-comin’. I was jest a-goin’ tu ast Uncle Lisher and Aunt Jerushy all abaout Westconstant an’ all the folks there, an’ naow there won’t be a chance tu put in a word aidgeways wi’ his pleggid French gab. Sis, we might ’s well be a-goin’.”

Antoine Bissette entered without ceremony, bearing such important news to Sam that for a moment he noted the presence of no one else.

“Hey, Sam, gat you gawn, wha’ you dawg? Dey black fox jes go on Bahlett hwood not more

as two hour 'go. Mah boy he 'll seen." Then his astonished eyes became aware of his old friends. "Oh-h-h! Onc' Lasha, Aunt Jerrusha. Was you be ghos' er was you be somebodee, er was Ah 'll be dream? Ah 'll never see so, 'for 'stoneesh."

"Good airth an' seas! Take a holt o' my han', Ann Twine, an' find aout whether I 'm flesh an' blood," cried the old cobbler; and his vise-like grasp and familiar roar left no cause for doubt of his actual presence in the flesh.

"Wal, seh, Onc' Lasha," said Antoine, settling himself together on a chair after the rough encounter of greeting, "you was felt pooty 'live anyway, an' you 'll ant gat great many hol' in de wes' bosc of it. No, seh, Aunt Jerrusha an' you ant look no more hol' you was t'ree year 'go. Bah gosh, Ah 'll glad of it."

"Same tu you, Ann Twine, an' we 're glad tu git back an' hev all aour frien's glad tu see us — that is, most on 'em," he added, recollecting that Mrs. Purington might wish to be excepted, and casting a sidewise glance at her.

"You need n't think 'at I begretch ye a welcome, Lisher Peggs, ef I be begretched it in my own darter's haouse!" she said in a grieved voice, while she puckered the hem of her orange and blue calico apron between her fingers.

"Wal, wal," said he, "ef folks did n't talk,

they would n't say nothin', an' I don't take no pride in what you said," and then turned the conversation again into the pleasanter channel whence he had maladroitly diverted it.

"Wal, Ann Twine, haow 's yer folks an' all the child'n? Fam'ly growin', I s'pose?"

"Wal, Ah do' know, Onc' Lasha; Ah guess dey ant be more as two or t'ree of it more, sin' you'll go 'way. But mah holdest gal he'll gat marree, an' he'll gat bebbie, an' Ah'll gat for be grrran'poupa." He rolled the "r" of this new prefix to his well accustomed title as if its flavor was pleasant to his tongue, and he straightened himself proudly in his seat.

"You a gran'pa," Uncle Lisha said. "Good airth an' seas, man, you'll hafter let yer baird grow tu tell yerself f'm yer gran'child."

"Ah'll can tol' it bah de nowse," Antoine laughed. "He'll ant spik Angleesh yit, an' prob'ly he'll ant never spik it lak Ah'll was," he added with a sigh that had something of satisfaction in it.

"It's hopesin' he won't," said Uncle Lisha.

If Antoine understood this disparaging remark he did not heed it, but went on: "An' Ah'll fregit for tol' you mah fam'ly been grow on t' udder en' of it. Mah fader an' mudder come for leeve 'long to me."

"What, you ben gettin' on ye a father? Was

he borned, tew, sen' I went away? You did n't uster hev none, an' I did n't s'pose you ever hed one in the nat'ral way, but they kinder faound ye in a kittle o' pea soup."

"Oh, One' Lasha, Ah 'll 'fraid you 'll ant growed gooder no more as you 'll grow holer. Ah 'll 'fraid you 'll ant go to meetin's in de Wes'. Prob'ly dey 'll ant gat some dere yet, hein? No, sah, One' Lasha, Sam fin' mah fader an' mudder daown to de lake w'en we was go feeshin', an' it was sup-prise of all of it. An' den, bombye, Ah 'll have it hol' man's an' hol' hwoman's come leeve long to me an' Ursule an' Ah 'll was glad for be hable ta' care of it, me."

"Thet 's right, Ann Twine," said Uncle Lisha heartily, "an' don't ye never gig back on yer ol' folks." A shade of sadness flitted across the old man's kindly face, and his wife breathed a suppressed sigh.

"Ah 'll goin' brought hol' man over for see you pooty soon," Antoine went on, as he whittled a charge of homegrown tobacco from a twist and ground it in his palm. "An' gat you for mek it some boot, so he can beegin for be Yankee. An' Ah 'll can mek you laughed for hear Sam talk French at it. Bah gosh, he 'll holler at it so you can hear it in de Forge w'en he goin'. An' he t'ink 'f he can holler laoud 'nough hol' man's can' help for on'stan, prob'ly."

"Antwine," said Sam, threatening the Canadian with the empty cider tumbler, and then filling it for him, "don't ye poke no fun at my French. It's the geniwine article, an' thet's the reason you Canucks don't onderstan' it. Ef you was tu go tu France, you 'd hear 'em a-speakin' on 't jest as I du."

"If dey spik it jes' sem as you was," said Antoine, briefly disposing of the cider, "Ah can go daown on de shore of de nocean an' heard it. Wal, you 'll goin' after dat black fox to-day, prob'ly?"

"Who seen it?" Sam demanded.

"Joe Hill tol' me he 'll seen it an' he tol' me come tol' you, but mah 'pinion he was lie jes' for sup-prise me of Onc' Lasha. Wal, Ah 'll be go, naow." And having fired his pipe with a coal, he went his way, leaving a long, odorous wake of rank tobacco smoke trailing far behind him.

"An' we must be goin', tew, Sis," said Mrs. Purington, "I hain't hed a chance tu say a word, but I must go."

"Why no, mother," Huldah protested, "you an' Sis must stay tu dinner."

"No, no, I got tu git back an' git his dinner an' it's a-gittin' late. I on'y come over tu chirk ye up, as I hope I hev at last, an' ask ye all tu come over tu Thanksgivin' tu-morrer tu aour haouse. We hain't goin' tu hev no gret, jest a

turkey an' some high bush cranb'ry sass an' punkin pie an' sech, but sech as 'tis we want ye tu jine us, all on ye."

"We wa'n't cal'latin' tu go home this year nor nowheres," Huldah began faintly objecting.

"Wal, you got tu come. He's clean sot on it an' you must come. Aunt Jerushy an' Uncle Lisher, we want the privilege o' fillin' ye up tu start on wi' sech as we've got. An' you must come, tew, Timothy."

There was general assent, and so, having made hospitable amends for the discomfort she had created, she departed. Panting as she gathered headway in her course across lots, she reminded Uncle Lisha vividly of the fussy little steamer that towed him to the last port of his recent voyage.

CHAPTER V.

THE COUNTRY POST-OFFICE.

THANKSGIVING festivities were over, and Uncle Lisha had been several days among his old neighbors, yet in deference to them, as in turn they were his entertainers and guests, and to himself as a returned traveler, he continued to wear his best clothes with heroic endurance of discomfort.

"I ben dressed up so long I begin to feel like a minister," he said, as he rapped the ashes from his pipe on Sam's stove hearth one morning when he had finished his after-breakfast smoke. "Ef I don't shuck myself aouten my t'other clo'es pooty soon, I shall be a-preachin' er duin' suthin' onbecomin'."

"Sho, Lisher, no you won't nuther," said his wife, casting an admiring glance upon him, and then fluttering across to remove a speck of lint from his trousers with a moistened forefinger. "But you have got tu take 'em off, Lisher Peggs. There's a gret grease spot half way t' yer knee. That's some o' Mis' Pur'n't'n's Thanksgivin' turkey's gravy. An' you got a gaub o' punkin pie on your weskit. It's a massy you did n't hev yer cut on, er you'd ha' spilte it."

“ Ketch me a-tacklin’ Thanksgivin’ wi’ my cut on. But I be goin’ tu shuck my high duck clo’es jest as soon ’s I go tu Solern’s an’ Joel Bartlett’s an’ daown t’ the store. I ’ll du that fust I du du, but fust of all I got tu seddaown an’ write George a letter. Hev you got s’m ink an’ a sheet o’ writin’ paper an’ a pen, Hully ? ”

Diligent search was rewarded by the discovery of a sheet of foolscap, the great freestone inkstand was taken down from the mantel and its half-dried contents diluted with water, and the quill pen made last winter by the schoolmaster was brought from its long rest and sucked into amenity of possible use. When the breakfast table was cleared to give Uncle Lisha an ample place for operations, he drew his chair to it, hooked his toes inside the front legs, set his elbows wide apart on the table, and, fencing in the paper with his arms, glared down upon it as if he would compel the words of his message to appear on the blank surface.

Except the baby and the hound, each member of the little audience had at infrequent intervals suffered the pain of letter-writing, and they awaited in sympathetic silence the first throes of the old man’s self-imposed torture, wherein hand and brain bore equal part. Aunt Jerusha’s needles clicked almost inaudibly, scarcely a clatter of the dishes in the pan denoted Huldah’s occu-

pation, while Timothy Lovel performed the usually noisy operation of feeding the fire without a sound, and Sam as silently drew the slide to get a coal for his pipe.

When Uncle Lisha had reckoned the day of the month on his fingers, he probed the depths of the inkstand with his pen and entered with cautious determination upon his labor. Except for the slower movement, the sound of his pen-strokes was much like that of his flote when he scraped the pegs from the inside of a boot, and, as he painfully fashioned each letter, his tongue went about his rounded mouth, and he emphasized the down strokes with a corresponding movement of his head. Holding the first line for inspection half way in its straggling formation, he roared out in vexation : —

“ Good airth an’ seas. Ef I hain’t gone an’ writ Danvis the 24th.”

“ You hain’t,” cried Aunt Jerusha, darting from her seat like a frightened hen and fluttering over to his side, where she adjusted her spectacles and scrutinized his work. “ Why, that hain’t nothin’, Lisher, you jest write, ‘of November’ arter 24, or jest Nove. for short. An’ that’s a turrible harnsome D, most like print.”

Mollified by this compliment, Lisha set about rectifying his mistake, while Aunt Jerusha went back to her rocking-chair. When the old man

was fairly settled down to his work, Sam and his father went to their husking in the barn, and Huldah, having finished her dishes, sat down to sewing and a whispered conversation with Aunt Jerusha, their guarded voices and the buzzing of the last bluebottle fly of the season in the sunny window quite overborne by the slow scratching of the pen and the vexed ejaculations of the writer when there was an uncommonly vicious splutter of his complaining implement.

"There," he cried at last, with a great sigh of relief, "I've got to the eend o' the dumb turkey tracks. They look's ef someb'dy ben shootin' at 'em wi' a shotgun all the way along," he commented as he scowled upon the sheet from various points of view. "Here, Jerushy, read it over, but don't ye read it aout laoud, an' then see ef you c'n du it up. Women's handier at duin' up'n what men be. They're uster duin' up sheets an' clo'es ev'ry week's i'nin'."

"It's jest like printin', Lisher Peggs, an' I c'n read it right through," as she slowly followed the lines to the end, "an' I do' know no way tu better it 'thaout you spelt Thanksgivin' wi' a big T, an' I do' know but a big G on 'caount of us bein' so thank'f'l tu git back."

Envelopes were not known in Danvis, and it needed the united endeavors of the old couple and Huldah to properly fold the letter and to tuck it

into itself. Then Uncle Lisha lost the only available wafer in a back corner of his mouth, whence it was not rescued until it had become a shapeless pulp, and there was nothing for it but to seal the missive with a lump of spruce gum which was stamped with the handle of a pegging awl. The superscription was written and carefully dried over the stove. Then Uncle Lisha laid the letter into the crown of his beaver hat, wadded it in place with his bandanna, put the hat on his head, struggled into his high-collared, tight-sleeved blue coat, and set forth toward the office with the dignity due to his important mission.

Though his feet were incased in his tight best boots, the familiar path was pleasant to him as to his eyes were all the wayside objects, the old wall parting with its gray lines the sumach thickets, now stripped of all their autumnal glory but the enduring scarlet of the bobs, the rail fence zigzagging among rank goldenrods whose riches were taking flight on white wings. A red squirrel tacked along the top rails in alternate nearer and further attendance upon him, yet keeping continually abreast till he came to a great butternut-tree, and, scrambling up its grooved bark, began jeering at his wayfaring comrade as impudently as his forebears had in bygone years. His gibes did not disturb the old man's equanimity as they might have ruffled the boy's. He smiled up at

him amusedly, and turned the squirrel's mockery to anger by picking up a brown nut and cracking it on the big rock that stood, as such are sure to do, the convenient adjunct of the butternut-tree, and, having cracked it, ate it under the very eyes of the self-assumed owner of all the nuts in Danvis.

The kernel had not the sweetness of those that Lisha had hopelessly stained his youthful hands to get sixty years before, yet it had something of the sweetness of the stolen meat and he assured himself : —

“ A Danvis but'nut was better 'n one o' them Westconstant shagbarks, that, big as they was, cracked disapp'intin', like airthenware, an' was more disapp'intin' when you come to eat 'em.”

There was a well-remembered beech, whose unshed golden-brown leaves were beginning to bleach to a pale tint, wherein a flock of silently industrious jays displayed brief glimpses of bright color. The spread of its wide branches and the girth of its huge trunk seemed scarcely increased by the many years of lusty growth since he carved the letters “ E. P.” and “ J. C.” entwined in a love knot on the smooth bark, yet initials and emblem and date of the dead old year were moss-grown scars. The old man smiled in kindly pity on the half-forgotten folly of the youthful lover, and then, looking about to see that no one saw him,

got out his knife and scraped the moss from the letters and love knot.

Then he stumped briskly forward, brushing the frost-blackened Mayweeds with hasty footsteps till he was startled by a vagrant partridge that burst from a clump of weeds close beside him and sailed on set wings away to the woods.

“Good airth an’ seas,” he exclaimed, as he watched the bird’s arrowy flight, curving down to cover at the woodside, “ye might’s well kill me as skeer me tu death. Oh, if you’d sot still an’ I’d seen you an’ hed me a gun, I’d ha’ got you. An’ I druther hev you’n tew perairie chickens.”

Crossing a little bridge, he presently came to the homestead of the Goves, on whom he called and found a warm welcome. After Mrs. Gove had bustled about to seat the visitor in the most comfortable chair and to send the youngest girl to call her father from the barn, she sat down opposite her old neighbor and devoted a few moments to a careful consideration of his appearance.

“Wal, Uncle Lisher,” she said, with an exhalation of satisfaction, “lookin’ at you, an’ not lookin’ back, it don’t seem’s ’ough you’d ben gone six mont’s. You hain’t altered a mite. An’ is Aunt Jerushy as chirk as you be? I wanter know! Well, the Western kentry has agreed wi’ you, uncommon.”

“It ’greed wi’ aour health better’n what it did

wi' aour feelin's. We toughed it aout 's long ' we could stan' it an' back we come tu bother aour ol' neighbors endurin' the rest o' aour days." His eyes came down from roving along the limp skeins of pumpkin hung to dry upon poles above the stove and settled with an inquiring look upon her face.

"You hain't never bothered nob'dy an' you won't never," she said heartily, and then bustling toward the door. "I wonder what's a-keepin' Levi; finishin' a bundle, proberbly, but I'll go an' git him."

"No, don't ye. I can't stop but a minute, an' I'll jest g' waout an' say haow de du. Fact on 't is," he said impressively, "I ben writin' a letter 'n I'm a-kerryin' of it tu the pos'-office. But where's Peltier?" he turned at the door to ask.

A troubled look overcast Mrs. Gove's cheerful face. "I do' know where Peltier is. Mebby he's gone lookin' at his mink traps, an' mebby he's over tu—tu—the village. Peltier's in a mis'able, mopin' way, Uncle Lisher. He's ben dis'p'inted. Expectin' tu marry a gal, even so fur's tu go tu git merried, an' she was gone wi' another feller, an' it's nigh abaout ondone him. He mopes an' he goes tu Hanner's, an' I'm afeared he drinks. I wish't you'd talk tu him, Uncle Lisher, he allers sot so much by ye, mebby

your talkin' 'ould 'mount tu suthin'. Me 'n' his father an' Sam's don't take no holt on him."

"Peltier was allus one o' my boys," the old man said; "I made him his fust boots an' showed him haow tu ketch his fust traout, an' he'd hear to me. I will talk tu him, Mis' Gove."

Levi Gove was too industriously inclined to quit labor for visiting, and after a brief but loud interchange of greetings, carried on amid the rustle of cornstalks, the old man went on his way to the store.

There he found the merchant and postmaster, as lank, alert, and clean shaven as ever, and as constantly saying "Yes" in varied inflections of assent or query, and effusive in the cordiality of his welcome.

The contents of the store were so unchanged that it seemed to the returned wanderer as if trade must have been dull during the three years of his absence. There were the bunches of whiplashes, the home-made hickory stock and the finer ones covered with leather or braided linen, the two strings of globular Boston bells still vainly inviting customers with the immovable smile of their brazen lips, the dusty, fly-specked tinware, the placards advertising Sherman's lozenges, which it was declared that worm-affected children cried for, and Hive Syrup, Down's Elixir and Spavin Cure, all displayed in the dusty windows

just as he had left them when he had no expectation of ever seeing them again. .

The whole interior was almost as unchanged. The cracks in the rusty sides of the great box stove had lengthened a little, the service of another crippled chair prolonged by nailing a strip of shoebox cover athwart its legs, the incrustation of dust a little thicker on the floor, the polish of the counters a trifle heightened by the elbows and posteriors of customers and loungers, and the marks of their heels worn deeper on the sides; but the shelves bore the same rolls of calicoes, ginghams, jeans, hard-times, and cotton, and at the top, above them, out of danger of breakage, were rows of blue-edged plates and figured tea-sets, paper boxes of spool thread, and bundles of leather and yarn mittens. A few loaves of sugar in dark purple paper wrappings hung from a beam overhead, beside dust-pans, brushes, brooms, mopsticks, and washboards, each in its familiar place.

“Glad to see you, Mr. Peggs. Haow’s everything an’ everybody aout West, Mr. Peggs? All a-gettin’ rich, I p’sume to say? Yes? A great kentry, but you didn’t feel tu hum. We won’t go back on ol’ V’mont, will we, Mr. Peggs? Leastways, I won’t, for all I’ve ben tu New York city an’ clean into the weste’n part of York State; I won’t go back on my natyve State.”

Uncle Lisher sympathized so fully in this allegiance that he was treated to a glass of frothy mead, and then, with a sudden recollection of his most important business, he carefully took off his hat and drew forth the letter.

"There 's a letter," handing it to the postmaster, "I wanter hev go tu my son, George Peggs, in Wesconstant. I suppose it will go all right, won't it, Mr. Clapham?"

The postmaster held it at arm's length above the level of his eyes and scrutinized it from that point for a while, then laid it on the counter, and, leaning over it on his elbows, as intently scrutinized it from above.

"Yes, Mr. Peggs," he said confidently, "that letter 'll go tu its deestination, without a daoubt. Yes, wonderful tu think on, hain't it," as he slowly wrote the postmark on the corner of the letter, "haow a message can go from here to the far distant West in ten days or a fortnit? Yes, eighteen and three-quarter cents is the postige your son 'll hafter pay, which he won't begretch it, for hearin' from his ven'able parents."

"It 's a dumbd sight more 'n its wuth to read, but I would n't ha' writ it for that. I'd rather tap tew pair o' boots."

When the letter was safely deposited in the drawer devoted to outgoing mail matter, Uncle Lisha readjusted his spectacles and inspected

the contents of the showcase that stood on the end of the counter, flanked by a wooden bowl of flints that still held their place against the invading percussion caps. The glass-covered treasures were, as of old, several pairs of yellow, wooden pocket-combs, shutting into each other, jewsharps on three-cornered wooden blocks, an array of jack-knives with checked bone handles, half a dozen razors, a tin shaving-cup with a square compartment built out one side, some cakes of perfumed soap, bundles of fish line, a box of very much mixed hooks, and paper boxes of caps, emblazoned with the letters "G. D." and an inscription said to be in French, which some doubted, for Antoine could not translate it when it was read to him. Beside these still lay the spring-top copper powder flask, a little more worn by the handling of impecunious admirers, and its companion in unsalableness, the wonderful shot pouch with a brass charger, both too expensive for the Danvis market. There was an exhibition of the choicest candy of the establishment, sticks with red and white spiral bands, bullseyes of like variegation, and sugar hearts so big and sweet that they might be hoped to soften the heart of any maiden.

"See anything you 'd like to purchase, Mr. Peggs?" and Clapham sidled behind the counter and examined the contents of the showcase as

interestedly as if he had just discovered it, "them razors, naow, is fust chop. I've used one of 'em four year an' it's as good as 't was the fust day. Yes? Wore out yourn a-travelin'?" and while speaking he took out a razor and combed his scanty locks with his fingers. Having selected a hair from the harvest thus secured, he succeeded in splitting it after several efforts. "It's keen as a brier. Yourn all right? Yes? I p'sume to say the one 't I sold you. Them's abaout the best combs 't I ever hed in my store. They kinder coax aout snarls 'thout pullin'. Yes, shavin'-brushes. That shavin'-soap'll make lather 'at a cat'll eat for cream an' never know the diffunce till she's troubled wi' wind on her stomerk."

"I guess I don't want none. It's tew high duck parfume tu go with the smell o' sole luther. What's these 'ere sugar hearts wuth?" he asked, tapping the glass above them with his forefinger.

"Them's a cent apiece; haow many shall I put ye up?"

"I guess I'll git one on 'em fer Samwill's boy, an' I guess I'll git a cent's wuth o' snuff fer Jerushy, an', lemme see, a snuff bean, she lost hern a comin' hum."

While the storekeeper wrapped the articles in frugal bits of newspaper, Uncle Lisha's roving eyes alighted upon a bundle of furs dangling from

a nail in the back part of the room, and being of the fraternity of hunters, his interest was at once aroused.

“Buyin’ some furs, be ye?” he asked, going over to the peltry and handling skin after skin of muskrat, mink, raccoon, and fox, and parting the fur of each with his breath.

“Wal, not to no great extent yet,” said Clapham, coming to him with the parcels. “Fur hain’t none tu prime yet, but I take it off folkses hands jest tu ’commerdate. But there’s one remarkable fine skin, Mr. Peggs, remarkable and uncommon,” and he drew out a dark gray skin and displayed it with great pride while Uncle Lisha readjusted his spectacles for a close inspection.

“That is a mighty harnsome coon-skin; I do’ know ’s ever I see a darker one.”

“Coon-skin, Mr. Peggs? I’m s’prised thet a nan of your experience an’ jedgment should call that a coon. It’s a gray fox, sir, and I paid the vally of half a dozen coon-skins fer it.”

“Mebby, but I never seen a fox wi’ rings on his tail.”

“It’s a peculiarity o’ the gray fox,” insisted Clapham.

Uncle Lisha only snorted his disbelief as he replaced his glasses in their steel case and shut it with an emphatic snap.

A bloomer off duty at the forge came lounging in, and to him the merchant appealed for some admiration of his late acquisition.

"It's a pooty fair kind of a coon-skin," said the bloomer, helping himself to a handful of chestnuts from a half bushel that stood on the counter.

"It's a gray fox; I bought it for a gray fox, an' that's what it is," Clapham said severely.

An amused grin spread across the unwonted cleanliness of the bloomer's face. "Bought it fer a gray fox," and his brawny form doubled over the counter in a fit of laughter out of which he ejaculated, "Oh, by Jeems Price, if that hain't a good one."

The sound of his laughter brought in others alert for anything to break the monotony of life, and as they stared from one to another, searching for the cause of mirth, their faces assumed a blankness of expectancy ready to be illumined with a laugh.

"Look at the gray fox-skin that Clapham's ben a-buyin'," cried the bloomer, pointing at the skin which its owner, though no longer proud of, stood by in sullen defiance.

"Du you purtend tu call that a fox, Mr. Clapham?" inquired one, and getting no answer appealed to the bloomer, who nodded assent. "Why, good land o' massy, 'tain't nothin' but a darned ol' dog coon." With a universal assent

to this verdict the company broke into a boisterous laugh. At the first lull of merriment Clapham snatched down the questionable peltry and said with savage solemnity, "It's a gray fox, gentlemen, but it's makin' altogether too much talk an' I ain't goin' to keep it on exhibition no longer," and throwing it spitefully up the stairway to the chamber, he slammed the door and shut off further inspection.

Amid a renewed burst of merriment Uncle Lisha withdrew quietly and took his way homeward. As he plodded past the Gove homestead the wandering thoughts that bore him company turned toward his young friend Pelatiah. He cast a searching glance about the premises, half hoping and yet half fearing that he might discover him, for he shrank from the duty to which he was committed.

"I s'pose I'd ort tu stop an' find the boy an' give him a talkin' tu, tu rights," he soliloquized, "but I guess I'd better wait an' ketch him kinder accidental. This 'ere cornerin' a feller up an' rammin' advice intu him somehaow don't make it set so well as it does to kinder coax it intu him julluk a pill in a spo'ful of apple sass."

He quickened his pace till he had passed the house and come to the little bridge that spanned Stony Brook. As he lingered there idly watching the flow of the stream whose every bend and

purling rapid and trout-haunted pool he knew as well as the corners of his old shop, and listening to its changing babble, familiar to his ear as the thud of the hammer on his own lapstone, he distinguished amid its liquid tones the sharp, metallic clink of a trap chain, coming, as a moment's listening assured him, from directly beneath the bridge.

"Someb'dy 's ketched a mink er a mushrat," said he to himself, "'n' I 'm goin' tu meddle wi' other folkses business tu the extent o' puttin' the poor creetur aouten his misery."

He descended to the bank, picking up a convenient cudgel as he went. When he peered into the dark shadow of the bridge he was not a little startled to discover the figure of a man sharply defined against the light. He was kneeling on the gravel between the abutment and the stream, so intently engaged in setting a trap that he was not aware of an intruder till Uncle Lisha tossed a pebble at his feet. The old man felt pretty sure of the trapper's identity, and was not surprised when Pelatiah's face was suddenly turned toward him with an expression of wonder overbearing its now habitual ruefulness.

His own silhouette, fore-shortened as he stooped beneath the low bridge, bracing his hands upon his knees, was not recognized at first, but there was no mistaking his hearty hail, "Good

airth an' seas! Peltier, don't ye know yer Uncle Lisher?" resounding with exaggerated volume through the narrow passage.

Pelatiah left the half-set trap and came crouching forth, brushing his soiled palm on his thigh in preparation for the vigorous hand-shaking that awaited him. When greetings were exchanged the two seated themselves on projections of the abutment and surveyed each other with kindly scrutiny.

"You hain't growed old a mite," said Pelatiah.

"I've ben a-growin' young sen' I come back makin' up what I lost in three year."

"An' Aunt Jerushy, is she tollable well?"

"Jest as smart as a cricket, an' tickled tu death tu git back hum again. An' haow 's things goin' wi' you, Peltier; well, I s'pose?"

"My health 's good 'nough," said Pelatiah, sighing as if that were an affliction, but Uncle Lisha did not heed it.

"Trappin' some, be ye?"

"Some; got a few traps sot fer mink an' mush-rat. The' 's a mink a-ha'ntin' raound this 'ere bridge."

"I heerd your trap a-jinglin' an' thinks, says I, the' 's suthin' er 'nother sufferin' intu a trap an' I'm a-goin' tu be marciful an' kill it, ef 'taint a skunk. My marcy don't extend tu skunks, erless I've got a gun. It 's tough for any creetur tu be

in a trap, whether no he's humern or a dumb critter. Both git intu 'em, an', more times 'an not, the' hain't no gittin' aout, on'y by death er takin' off a laig. Most any dumb critter 'd ruther git free at the price of a laig er foot 'an tu stay an' die er be knocked in the head, an' they're sensibler 'an lots o' folks which they 'll jest hump theirselves an' grunt an' squall er flummix permisc'us till they git t' other foot an' like 's not both han's intu another trap, an' there they be. The grip o' the trap gits sorer and sorer, an' they quit a-pullin' an' give clean up, which hain't no way fer a man tu du." The old man beamed a kindly smile upon his companion, who sat with downcast eyes, slowly grinding the gravel beneath the heel of his cowhide boot, upon which Uncle Lisha's eyes finally fell, to note with displeasure that it was ripped and red for lack of grease.

"An' you've goddaown tu buyin' store boots. Goo' fer nothin' things, made aouten split luther an' stuck together wi' short paigs. An' the idee of a feller 'at ketches mushrat, an' hes their ile, lettin' his boots git as red as a fox's tail." He evidently thought Pelatiah in a desperate strait and spoke with such sudden sharpness that the young man was startled from his listless attitude. "But you come up," he said with less asperity, "an' lemme take the measure o' yer hommels an' I 'll make ye suthin' 'at you 'll know you've got on

when you wear 'em, an' that 'll be wuth spendin' a leetle ile on." Then, almost without pause, he said, irrelevantly, "Why, Peltier, from what I heerd I 'spected tu find you merried an' settled daown, stiddy." Pelatiah flushed and made a quick, impatient movement. "Wa'n't you expectin' tu, one spell?"

"Ef I was, I hain't naow, nor never shall ag'in," the young man said in a low voice.

"Why, what's the motter ails ye? Merryin's a good thing when ye find the right one."

"Haow in tunket's a feller goin' tu tell when he hes?" Pelatiah asked, rising in such excitement that he bumped his head against the planks and sat down as suddenly as he had risen.

"Hurt yer head much?"

"Wisht I'd knocked the dumb thing off 'n my shoulders," he replied savagely. "Haow's a feller goin' tu tell? That's what I'd like tu know. I thought I'd faound the right one, an' I thought more on her 'an all the hull world. I worshiped the airth she walked on. She might ha' walked on me — she did pooty nigh, an' I was praoud tu hev her. An' I, dumb fool, thought she liked me jest as much. Mebby she did, fer a spell, an' thought she'd faound her mate, — it's hopesin she wa'n't foolin' me the hull endurin' time, — an' then 'at she had n't. She promised tu hev me an' we was a-goin' tu be merried, an' the

time was sot, an' then at the last minute she went off wi' another feller an' — an' I s'pose they're merried, but I can't seem tu think on her as belongin' tu nob'dy else. She'd ort tu suffer some, but I hope she's happier 'n what I be. She might be, an' yit be in hell."

"You hed bad luck, Peltier, but all women hain't alike."

"The' hain't none no better 'n she was," Pelatiah said vehemently. "The' wa'n't never one harnsomer, an' haow could there be one better otherways? They're all fickleder 'n the wind that blows, an' lighter 'an the blubbers on this brook."

"T ain't no sech a thing," said Uncle Lisha, emphasizing each word with a downward jerk of his head. "I've roosted wi' one womern goin' on tow-ards forty year that's ben faithful an' true all them years, an' ther's lots more o' the same sort, fer I don't cal'late I'm the on'y lucky man on the livin' airth. You got intu a trap nat'rally 'nough, bein' 't was baited wi' a pooty face, an' it kinder leggo, an' naow ye c'n shake a loose foot which you'd ort tu be thankful it did n't take a laig, so tu speak, er mebbly yer life."

"It might's well. I wisht it hed," said Pelatiah, grinding the gravel away savagely with his heel.

“Sho, no, you don’t, nuther. Say, Peltier, what d’ ye du wi’ yer fur? Sell it tu Clapham, du ye? You did n’t sell him that ’aire gray fox?”

Pelatiah could not withhold a laugh. “No, that was a feller f’m over the maountain.”

“You du sell tu Clapham?”

“No, Hamner ’s hed most on ’t.”

“Hamner? He don’t pay cash?”

“No;” but Pelatiah did not look up.

“Look a-here, Peltier Gove,” said the old man impressively, “you ’re a-flummuxin’ intu a wus trap ’n the fust one was, a-tryin’ tu draowned yer trouble wi’ rum, ’specially Hamner’s pizen. Rum may cure a belly-ache, but not never a heart-ache, not tu stay cured. It ’ll numb it fer a spell, but it ’ll make it come on wus ’n ever, an’ need heftier dostin every time tu numb it ag’in. I do’ know haow long you ben a-tryin’ on ’t, but I du know ’at you ’ve faound it jest ’s I tell ye. An’ you ’ve got tu stop it right stret off er you’re a gone sucker. Right stret off. Not no foolin’ wi’ one more drink, ner no tu-morrers, ner birth-days, ner New Years, ner leavin’ off gradwil. It ’ll be a tough job, but you c’n du it. Shet your maouth as tight as if ’t was sewed up wi’ a waxed cend, an’ don’t ye onrip it fer no coaxin’, inside er aout. You’ve got tu du the job yer-self, not but what God A’mighty ’ll help ye, but

you've got tu boost, tew. I cal'late 'f the' 's go-in' tu be any prayin' done, a feller hed better du it fer himself. It'll 'maount tu more 'n all the ministers this side o' kingdom come, a-prayin' for him. An' naow I've said my say, an' you c'n go on settin' your mink trap. Bait it wi' mush-rat 'f you've got it, it's better 'n fish. Don't forgit what I've said tu ye, an' come an' see Aunt Jerushy soon 's you can. I shall git settled daown tu work in tew, three days, an' I want all on ye tu come in, jest as ye uster in th' ol' shop. Good-by."

He stooped his way out with due care for his head and its precious covering, and clambering to the roadway resumed his homeward course.

"There," he said, with a sigh of relief, "I've gi'n the boy his pill. I d' know but I forgot the apple sass, but it's hopesin it won't set bad an' ll du him good."

Pelatiah sat long after his old friend left him, with his chin upon his hands, staring abstractedly on the swift current of the brook, in whose voice he seemed to hear the kindly words of advice repeated again and again. When he arose and resumed the setting of his trap his face wore a stronger and more hopeful expression.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PARING-BEE.

NEXT morning Uncle Lisha laid aside his holiday attire with a sense of great relief from the constraint and care which their wearing had imposed upon him, and put on his ordinary garb with the comfortable feeling of being rehabilitated in his real self. Making such haste with his breakfast that Aunt Jerusha said he was "in a bigger hurry 'n a boy a-goin' a-fishin'," he put on his leather apron and set about the odd jobs of mending for the family.

Sam and his father went out to their husking, and the door between the kitchen and the shop being opened, that the old man might have the companionship of the women folks, the house presently rang with the merry thud of the hammer on his lapstone.

Huddah was paring apples with a worn-out shoe knife discarded from Uncle Lisha's kit, and Aunt Jerusha quartered and cored them with frugal care that the least possible share should go to the pigs, while the baby made frequent excursions on all fours between the two great objects of interest presented by the two industries.

Now he brought a chubby fistful of stolen shoe pegs to his mother's knee, then made restitution to the owner with a slice of apple, begrimed by repeated contact with the floor during its transportation.

"Why, yes, bub," said the old man, beaming down a kindly glance through his round glasses upon the upturned baby face as he took the proffered gift and laid it on the bench beside him, "it's turrible nice, but Uncle Lisher don't 'pear tu feel like eatin' on 't jest naow. He hain't apple hungry; guess he eat tew much breakfus' er suthin'. Ta' keer. Don't put his leetle hanny ont' the lapstun. Git it smashed finer 'n a barn. No, bubbly, could n't hev the wax. Gaum him all up so 't mammy 'd hafter nigh abaout skin him tu git him clean ag'in; an' haow she would scold both on us, an' haow we would cry, would n't we? Here, take a pooty paig to Aunt Jerushy an' ask her 'f she ever see sech a cur'osity. Clipper, naow."

"Thank ye, a thaousan' times, you darlin' cree-tur," cried Aunt Jerusha, when the child had scrambled to her with his gift. "I never see a neater paig an' I'm a-goin' tu keep it tu hev me a shoe made. These 'ere apples seems ef they was gittin' turrible meller, Huld'y, an' wa'n't a-goin' tu keep no gret spell."

"I know it," said Huldah, putting a thin slice

between her lips and meditatively munching it. "There's lots an' sacks on 'em that's all squ'sh, an' ef we save many of 'em we've got tu hev a parin'-bee ef you an' Uncle Lisher could stan' the rumpus."

"Stan' it! Law sakes. I could stan' a leetle o' the young folkses catousin, an' he'd enj'y it jest as much as any on 'em, furzino. But apple cuts is turrible wasteful an' mussin' an' gin'ally cost more 'n they come tu."

"But we'd get the apples worked off an' the young folks'd have a good time. I wonder if father Lovel would care?"

"Law sakes alive," said Aunt Jerusha, "if he c'd stan' S'manthy twenty year, I guess he c'n stan' one evenin's catousin. But hear me talk, an' she an ol' neighbor an' your mother-in-law ef she was a-livin'. Lisher!" she called, "du you s'pose you an' Timerthy could stan' it, ef we had a apple cut?" and she shook her knife at Huldah while they paused in their work to hear his answer.

"A apple cut? A parin'-bee? Good airth an' seas! You jest try it an' see. I bate ye, me an' him 'll shake our hommels wi' the spryest on em."

"What 'd I tell ye?" Aunt Jerusha whispered triumphantly.

When the subject was broached to them at

dinner, Sam and his father made no objections, and it was settled that the entertainment should be given as soon as the necessary preparations could be made.

A whole day was spent in bountiful if not elaborate cooking; the frying of at least a bushel of doughnuts and the making and baking of pumpkin pies, whose crowded ranks filled half the pantry shelves. Then the rooms were put in cleanly order, which Aunt Jerusha declared, while giving her best efforts to it, "A useless work, a-scrubbin' an' puttin' tu rights jest tu hev 'em mussed an' cluttered intu jest a hoorah's nest."

Meantime invitations were issued, not on perfumed paper, but by hearty word of mouth, and given pretty generally yet discreetly.

"Don't ye gin no invite tu none o' them Forge fellers," said Huldah as Sam lingered on the threshold in indecision between the various routes. "They 're such a rantankerous passel o' critters, allers fer raisin' a rumpus. An' don't ye forgit tu gin Tom Hamlin a bid, an' his parin'-machine, both on 'em, for one hain't no good without t' other. An' come raound by Joel Bartlett's an' git ten paound o' his best cheese, but don't let him know what ye want on 't. He would n't knowingly let his cheese git mixed up wi' no sech worl' people's fryvolity."

“Sho, I guess his screuples hain’t wuth more ’n seven cents a paound,” said Sam irreverently.

“An’ I hope you ’ll make it a pint tu give Peltier a bid tu the apple cut,” Uncle Lisha called from the shop; “he needs chirkin’ up wust of any on us, the poor love-cracked creetur. Ef Danvis gals is pooty ’s they was when aour womern was gals, Samwill, the’ ’ll be some here pooty enough tu take his mind off ’m that lake shore gill flirt, maremaid, I d’ know but she is. Did he find her in the lake, Samwill? An’ ef ye can scare up a fiddler, git him. What ’s come o’ that leetle hump-backed feller ’at, when he sot in the corner a-fiddlin’, you could n’t see nothin’ on, behind his fiddle. But good airth an’ seas, he ’d saw that fiddle all up into tunes. He ’d be ekernomical for a kitchen tunk, gitten’ intu a corner so, aout ’n the way.”

Sam hurried away before he should be burdened with further instructions, lamenting as he went the loss of so fine a hunting morning.

On the evening appointed for the entertainment the full moon was seen, but as a pale and dimly defined blotch behind the gray veil of cloud that overspread the sky and blended with the vague rim of the horizon.

There was a dull, sullen chill in the air, which was motionless in the expectancy wherewith nature so often awaits her changes. The night

was jarred by the rumble of wagons jolting over the frozen roads and pierced by the merry voices of coming guests.

Some of these were occupants of the wagons, above whose rumble and clatter they strove to make one another hear between abrupt breaks of the thread of conversation when a wheel struck a stone or dropped into a rut. Some were coming across the fields on foot in couples and squads, but it was noticeable that the couples emerged from the half gloom before their voices were heard, while the gabble and laughter of the groups ran far before them to herald their coming.

Beams of light shone hospitably forth from every window of the kitchen and square room, and the heavy latch clanked and the door slammed announcement of the frequent arrivals.

The women folks came from the bedroom, where they had bestowed their hoods and shawls and cloaks on Huldah's bed, each with an apron shielding the front of her tidy calico or homespun woolen gown. The men hung their coats on the pegs of the kitchen wall and became comfortable in their accustomed indoor shirt-sleeves.

Soon pans and knives were brought forth, bushel baskets of apples lugged in, chairs drawn into convenient groups, and the business of the evening began.

Tom Hamlin and another almost as famous an apple parer bestrode their machines, placed on the seats of high-backed chairs, and entered upon such a strife for the championship that the clattering din of their clumsily geared machines was almost incessant, and the parings spurting from their knives in curved jets were scarcely broken in the quick shifting of the apples on the forks. Presently a dozen pairs of hands were busy quartering the peeled apples, as many more were coring them, while others strung them with wire needles on long strings of pack thread, for drying.

Every one except Tom Hamlin and his rival was talking, and almost every voice strove to make itself heard above every other and the deafening clatter of the machines. Some couples with heads close together utilized the uproar to say things meant for no other ears.

In the centre of an interested group, Uncle Lisha, splitting apples with his shoe knife, roared like a lion concerning the wonders of the West, and to as interested a feminine audience, Aunt Jerusha quavered shrilly of the discomforts of Western life while she industriously strung the quarters of apples in her pan.

"Fifty an' a hunderd acres in one field o' wheat an' the hull on 't as level as the Forge Pawnd," Uncle Lisha shouted.

“Ten mile tu the nighest store,” shrieked his wife to her group of listeners, “an’ when you got to ’t, the tea an’ snuff they kept wa’n’t wuth a-kerryin’ hum, though goodness knows they ast enough for ’em. Land sakes ! how be I goin’ to git a pinch o’ snuff, wi’ both my han’s in these ’ere apples ?”

“Jest look o’ Mandy Varney,” cried a buxom damsel to those around her. “She hain’t done nothin’ only chank every identicle quarter she’s cored, an’ listen to that Jim Putman, sence she soddaown. Wonder ef she thinks it’s a-sparkin’ bee steady a parin’-bee ?”

“What s’pose the reason is, the’ hain’t none o’ Cap’n Peck’s folks come ?” inquired another high-keyed voice ; to which a middle-aged matron answered, with a backward toss of the head, while she kept her eyes rigidly fixed upon her apple and knife, “Proberbly they’re ’bove goin’ to such common duins, naow ’t he’s sot in the Leegislatur. Ef ’t was ’fore ’lection the’ ’d all ha’ come fast ’nough.”

“They du say ’at on the stren’t h on ’t she’s ben tu V’gennes an’ bought a hull set o’ flowin’ blue dishes. Clapham had n’t nothin’ quite good enough for a member o’ the Leegislatur’s wife,” cried another.

“Highty tighty,” said the elder matron, “an’ there be them ’at hain’t so turrible old that

remember when the hull fam'ly eat the' puddin' an' milk aouten braown airthenware bowls, an' glad 'nough to get 'em." Even Danvis was not without its social jealousies.

"Suthin' ben a ketchin' Joel Bartlett's sheep," announced one of a knot of married men, who, assembled apart from their wives, were not laboring very assiduously. "Some thinks it's dawgs an' some thinks it's a animil."

"'Tain't no ways likely it's a bear," another remarked; "the time o' the year's ag'in' that. But it might be a painter."

"Wal, no, I don't favor the idee, 'cause the' was ten or a dozen sheep 't was killed aout an' aout; jest the' thrut cut. A painter would n't ha' killed more 'n one or tew, an' sati'fied hissself a-eatin' the meat. Hain't that so, Samwill?" appealing to their host, who had come within call as he moved from group to group to see that each was properly provided for.

"I cal'late it's a wolf," he said, "from what I've hearn tell o' their duins. More 'n all that, I've consaited all the fall 'at the' was one a-hangin' raound, fer I've seen signs 'at I could n't lay to no other critter. But ef he don't make himself seace 'fore many hours, I reckon we'll have a chance to find aout what he is, fer ef it don't snow before mornin' I miss my guess."

"I'm a-goin' aout tu take a look o' the weather

jest fer greens,” said one of the party, rising with a sigh of relief and dropping his pan in his chair. After an absence which must have enabled him to make a thorough study of the weather, he re-entered the kitchen so powdered with snow that he did not need to proclaim that “it was snowin’ like fun.”

Many of the company needed further ocular proof of his report, and hastened forth to obtain it, while others were content to cool their noses against the window panes and stare out upon the landscape grown more obscure behind the veil of falling snow, all dull and lifeless, but for the candles’ weird reflections — unreal lights by which, perhaps, witches were holding carnival. Perhaps it was the hope of beholding them that so long kept some fair cheeks in close proximity to bearded ones.

“If it holds up by mornin’ I’ll take a rantom-scoot up back o’ Joel’s and see what tracks I c’n find,” Sam said, and hurried away as Tom Hamlin, tossing away the last apple and kicking over the empty basket, shouted, “Fetch on your apples ef you want ’em skinned.”

So with unflagging zeal and unabated clamor of voices, and clatter of implements and machines, the work went on till half a dozen bushels of apples were on the strings and ready to festoon the kitchen walls and poles that hung from hooks

in the ceiling, and the welcome announcement was made that the labor of the evening was over.

“Naow, then,” said Sam, making his way with careful steps across the floor slippery with scattered skins and cores, “we’ll clear up the thickest o’ this mess and then we’ll see ef aour womern folks has saved any cold victuals fer us. I believe I saw some cold ’taters in the buttry an’ I do’ know but the’ ’s some o’ Drive’s johnny-cake left.”

But before the floor was cleaned, a dozen girls must try for their lover’s initials with apple parings whirled thrice above their heads and cast over the right shoulder to the floor behind them.

“Wal! fer all the world,” cried Amanda Varney, blushing as red as the apple peeling she had just cast behind her, and was now regarding with surprised delight, “ef it hain’t a perfect P.”

“It might be most anything,” said Mary Ann Jones, who in the early evening had called attention to Amanda’s flirtation.

“’T would be good enough ef you’d ha’ made it,” said Amanda; “I’ll leave it tu Uncle Lisher ef ’t ain’t a good P,” as the old man drew near the circle widening to admit him.

“Yes,” he said, after adjusting his spectacles and critically examining the initial. “It’s julluk handwritin’. But it don’t stan’ fer Putman ner

fer Peggs. It 's tew long and lank. Guess it stands fer Peltier. Come here, Peltier."

The young man, who was moping in a corner, made his way toward them. "It 'pears tu be p'inted by fortin 'at you 've got tu dance 'long wi' Mandy. Naow, you be ready tu take your place wi' her soon 's we get suthin' tu eat." Then whispering into his ear like a blast of northeast wind, "Naow du try tu shake some o' the sorrow aout o' your heart when th' dancin' begins."

"Gosh, Uncle Lisher," said Pelatiah, aghast at the plan, and casting a hopeless glance upon his big boots. "I can't dance no more 'n a thirty-foot ladder."

"Wal, 'f you hain't got the tools, I do' know who hes, an' you 've got tu use 'em if I hafter yard ye top o' the hot stove. Come, gals, le' 's git things sot tu rights so 't we c'n eat an' git tu the rale business o' the evenin'."

Then the guests, ranged along the walls of the kitchen and spare room, were amply served with Huldah's doughnuts, pies, and cheese, and Sam's cider received its usual compliments.

Then the young people engaged in romping games, the Needle's Eye, wherein every one who could sing and every one who could not, sang, or tried to sing, at the top of their voices : —

"The needle's eye, that doth soffy the thread that runs so treue,
It has caught many a smiling lass and naow it has caught yeou!"

or with a volume and zest that would have pleased Gran'ther Hill more than the melody, "We're marching onward tow-ard Quebec." In every game the forfeits were invariably kisses, given and paid in the simplest and most direct manner, or when so decreed, in the contortions of a "double and twisted Loddy massy." The movements of another popular game were timed to the words of "Come, Philander, le' 's be a-marchin'." The elders looked on in amused toleration, while a few joined the young folks' games only to be reminded, by grudgingly paid forfeits, that the freshness of youth had departed from their wrinkled cheeks.

"Come," at last cried Uncle Lisha, who by tacit consent assumed the office of master of ceremonies, "you young folks orter be abaout cl'yed wi' bussin' an' we ol' folks has eat saour grapes long 'nough, so le' 's all turn tu an' hev a leetle sensible enj'yment a-dancin'. Where's thet aire leetle fiddler."

"He hain't come anigh," Sam answered. "He promised he'd come sartin sure, but I'm most afeerd he 's run ag'in' a snag tu Hamner's 'at he won't git clear on, 'fore mornin'. It 's tew tarnal bad."

"Well, that 's a pretty haow de du," said the old man, "but we won't be cheated aout'n aour dancin' by one drunken fiddler. Tom Hamlin, 'd

ye fetch yer jewsharp in your pocket? er can you dig one up, Samwill?" Tom "hed n't never thought on 't," nor could Sam find the only instrument upon which he ever played.

"Wal, then, I 've got tu sing, which I 'll make you hear me, ef I don't charm none. Chuse your pardners naow or never an' form ont' the floor. Come, Peltier, git Mandy and stan' up tu the dough dish."

Pelatiah hung back bashfully till Amanda, seeing her rival, Mary Ann, led out by Putnam, blushing with vexation, met him more than half-way, and he found his unwilling feet taking him to his place in the waiting ranks.

"All ready. Naow I 'm goin' tu sing," shouted Uncle Lisha, and began to roar in stentorian tones:—

"Lum tiddle, lum tiddle, t'l law day,
Lum tiddle —

"Good airth an' seas! Why don't ye start yer hommels? D' ye s'pose I 'm goin' tu set an' holler all night for you tu stan' an' gawp julluk tew rows o' stancheled calves?"

Thus adjured the first couple paddled and sailed down the middle, when he again took up his wordless song, and twenty-four pairs of feet, impatient for their turn, began to stamp and shuffle to its rhythm:—



Lum tid - dle, lum tid - dle, t'l law day,



lum tid - dle, lum tid - dle, t'l law day,



do day hum, do day hum, do day hum, t'l law day.

Antoine, sitting by Uncle Lisha, and attempting to catch the tune in snatches of undertone, played an imaginary fiddle and pranced time with both feet after the Canadian fashion, evidently considering himself the chief performer.

The dancers quickly caught the inspiration of well-meant, if unmelodious, strains, and whirled and capered in perfect abandonment to their influence. Even Pelatiah's bashfulness melted away in the excitement, and he made wild rushes at wrong moments and in wrong directions, which involved him and his partner in bewildering entanglement with other couples.

"Turn yer pardener half way raound,
Lum tiddle, lum tiddle, t'l law day,
Half way raound, half way raound, do day hum, t'l law day."

Uncle Lisha sang at him vociferously, and Antoine chimed in with, "Turn yo' pahdny

wrong side aout," to Pelatiah's complete bewilderment. Then young Putnam, striving to outdo his own agile steps, as he pranced down the middle with Mary Ann Jones, slipped on a fragment of apple peel and fell headlong, plowing his way along a rank of dancers and turning a furrow of them on top of himself. Uncle Lisha still sang on, his voice rising above the din of shrieks and laughter, till it dawned upon him that no one was dancing and his music was being poured forth to no purpose.

In the lull that presently succeeded the confusion the company became aware of the notes of a fiddle, whence coming no one could conjecture, faintly yet distinctly playing the familiar air of "Money Musk." While all listened, some puzzled and some breathless, and some superstitiously alarmed, Solon Briggs oracularly voiced the prevailing feeling, in a solemn, awe-stricken tone:—

"That fiddle hain't performed by no livin' han's. Watson Parmer has pairished, mis'rabable, in the element of the snow, and his speerit has come to fulfill his 'pintment made to Samule. It's Watson Parmer's indivisible apperagotion."

"Beeswax," cried John Dart, listening at the open door. "Go to thunder wi' yer speerits! It's someb'dy in the woodshed. Gimme a light an' I'll see who 'tis."

Taking a candle and protecting it with his hol-

lowed hand, he made his way to the woodshed, followed by the bolder of the company, close at his heels, the more timid crowding one another in the rear, where the light of the open door mistily illumined the falling snow. Under cover of the shed, and held high above Dart's head, the candle struggled with the gloom, till it disclosed a dismally comic little figure crouched in a limp heap, with its back against a barrel, its disproportionately long legs looped over the bar of a sawhorse on which it had attempted to seat itself. The snow-laden hat had fallen over the face, and the short body was hidden by the fiddle which the owner was playing with a skill that had survived inebriation, while in a thin and drunken voice he prompted the movements of a country dance.

"Firsh cou'le. Daow' er mi'le. Balansh. Daow a rou' shide."

"Wal, I swan," Dart ejaculated, "'f 't ain't speerits, arter all. Hamner's, inside o' Wat Parmer. Hamner'd ortu be kicked tu death by cripples for a-lettin' on him git so. Wat," taking the hat from the fiddler's face, shaking the snow from it, and adjusting it in its proper place, "don't be a-wastin' your music on the wood pile. You can't git no dancin' aout on 't. Come int' the haouse."

But the hunchback's face, vacant of everything save its habitual expression of pain, only

stared blindly into space and the merry tune went on.

“You might as well talk tu a post. Take a holt o’ the light, some on ye;” and giving the candle into other hands, he got behind the little man, and, placing his arms under the limp legs, lifted him as easily as one might a child, and in such a position the playing of the violin was not interrupted, and so, preceded by the candle-bearer, carried him into the house. As they entered, Palmer’s drunken fancy moved him to strike up, “The Campbells are Coming.”

“The camels is comin’,” cried Beau Putnam. “Don’t ye see the hump?”

“Shut yer head, you blasted monkey,” Dart growled so savagely that the grin faded out of Putnam’s face, and the laugh that his coarse jest created died out in a suppressed titter.

“Here’s your music, Lovel,” Dart announced, as he deposited his light burden on a chair, “the best fiddler in Charlotte county. He’s a leetle mite tired jest naow, but when he gits rested he’ll set all yer feet flyin’ in spite of ye. Mis’ Lovel, won’t ye give him a cup o’ tea, hot an’ strong?”

When the little man had been somewhat restored to his proper self, he tuned his violin and then drew from it such blithe and melodious strains that all forgot his deformity. Even he,

with loving eyes fixed upon his instrument, his worn face alight with a tender emotion that softened the lines which pain and dissipation had drawn upon it, seemed for the time also to have forgotten it.

Uncle Lisha, relieved of his musical labors, abandoned himself to the pleasures of the dance with a grace and agility that filled Aunt Jerusha's heart with pride, albeit they were such as a sportive bear exhibits. Antoine was given the floor for a while, as, to a tune of his own choosing, he danced a Canadian jig. Every one was a wide-awake and active participant in the gayety except the baby and the old hound, the one sleeping, undisturbed by the noise and commotion, whereof the other was a resigned but unhappy spectator under the circumscribed shelter of the stove.

When the dance ended, and the guests, even now acknowledging no fatigue, began to depart, the morning star was shining through the breaking clouds and the day was faintly dawning upon a world whose new whiteness looked strange to eyes that last beheld it, dun and gray with the dreariness of late autumn.

"Naow fetch on that leetle fiddler," John Dart commanded when he had tucked his Sarah Ann snugly in the buffalo-skins. "I'm a-goin' tu git him safte past Hamner's ef I hafter lock him up

in his fiddle box. We wanter keep him for another apple cut. Here, Wat, cuddle in there 'twixt me an' Sary Ann, we're both on us small. Here ye be. Good-night, Lovel, ef 'tain't tew airly. I'll be on hand ef the's a wolf hunt. G' lang, Bob."

"It's complete trackin' snow," said Sam to a group of hunters who lingered last at his threshold, and he stooped to imprint the snowy banking with his finger. "I'll see what it's got tu tell us an' let you know. Good-mornin'."

The wagons moving over the muffled roads, and the quiet of the sleepy junketers, marked their departure with silence as noticeable as the noise of their coming.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE LINTER.

NOTWITHSTANDING the prolonged revels of the previous night, several neighbors dropped in at the shop in the Linter the evening of the following day to learn of any news of the ravager of Joel Bartlett's flock. Sam had not yet returned from his quest, and, while they awaited his coming with different degrees of patience, they fell very naturally into the accustomed ways of the old shop.

Solon Briggs took his seat behind the stove, Joseph Hill seated himself with laborious care on the chair of most doubtful stability, Antoine sat on the floor with legs crossed after the fashion of Turks and tailors, and Pelatiah perched uncomfortably, as became his state of mind, on the corner of the shoe bench. With the autocrat of the little realm on his leathern throne, the social pipes alight, Pelatiah ruminating his innocuous cud, they could hardly realize that the old familiar intercourse had suffered a three years' hiatus.

Uncle Lisha yawned over his work till he

pounded his thumb with a misdirected stroke, and then, while he sucked the injured digit, impatiently cast aside hammer, awl, and lasted shoe.

“Consarn it all,” he grumbled, “carummuxin don’t tarve so well wi’ seventy odd as it does wi’ twenty odd year. Jest one night on ’t hes made me sleepier ’n a Quaker meetin’, but when I was Peltier’s age I c’d go it eight nights in a week an’ work busy ’s a bee all day. Dumbd if I try tu work. Seem’s ef ’t was ’baout time for Sam tu come hum.”

“I should raly like to know what specie of savagarious beast has been a-deevastatin’ Joel’s sheep.”

“Proberbly,” said Joseph, venturing to tilt his chair on its front legs to enable him to spit at the stove hearth, “it’s a wolf er suthin’.” The chair gave a creak ominous of collapse, and he carefully readjusted it to its complete if precarious support of his weight. “Seem’s ’ough this ’ere chair was a leetle mite more weewaw ’an it uster be,” and he leaned cautiously to one side and the other to inspect the spreading legs, “but I don’t know as it is,” slowly bending forward for a general survey of them, between his spread knees; “I guess it ’ll stan’ a spell.”

“I wish ’t you’d bust the tarnal ol’ thing, Jozeff,” said Uncle Lisha, with nervous impa-

tience. "It's squeaked an' it's squoke till I am sick an' tired of it."

"It best was, you'll seet where Ah'll was, Zhoseff, den it an't be danger for fall off or broke up you sit, an't it?"

"Judgin' f'm what I hearn," said Uncle Lisha, after watching the chair with a hope of the fulfillment of his wish, "I s'pect it's a wolf. It's ben a good spell sen' there's ben one on 'em raound these parts. It's a massy the varmints ain't so thick as they used tu be. When I was a boy you c'd hear 'em a-yowlin' up on the maountain, most any night, 'nough tu make yer back freeze. Naow an' ag'in, they used tu kill folks, I s'pose. I never knowed o' their killin' anybody fer sartain, but some on 'em 'lowed they killed Cephas Worth an' eat him clean up, an' then ag'in, some cal'lated they did n't."

"Haow was 't?" Pelatiah asked, agape, the swab, wherewith he was greasing his boot, arrested halfway between it and the pot of neat's foot oil.

"If it wa'n't 'at I got feelin's fer ye," said Uncle Lisha, regarding his employment with some severity of expression, "I would n't allow you tu waste that precious intement on none o' Clapham's store boots. That aire was made for honest boots, but it don't signify; ile away. Why the way on 't was, ye see Cephas was sugarin'

way up on the aidge o' the maountain a mild f'm hum. He hed him a shanty an' kerried up provisions tu last him tew, three days an' would n't go hum on'y abaout oncte in so often, jest puttin' in his best licks makin' sugar, when there was a big run o' sap. Wal, it run along one spell, nigh onter a week, an' he did n't come hum, an' his womern begun tu tew abaout him, 'cause it wa'n't no gre't sugar weather an' she knowed his victuals must be all used up, 'cause he was hearty tu eat, an' bimeby she raousted aout the neighbors tu go an' look him up. Another thing 'at made 'em oneasy abaout him was 'at the wolves was turrible sassy that spring, an' they'd hearn 'em a-yowlin' up in the neighborhood o' Cephas's camp oncommon, so up they went, Beedy along wi' the rest on 'em. Obedience her name was, but they all called her Beedy. When they come to 't, the shanty was hove hither an' yon, an' tore tu flinders, an' not a sign o' Cephas, on'y a piece o' kwut, an' a dozen bones gnawed clean. Some was cock sure they was his 'n, an' some hed the' daoubts on 't, an' there was some sprinkle o' blood an' wolf tracks all raound thicker 'n spatter, an' ev'rything clawed and chawed, 'ceptin' the tub o' sugar. Beedy hed it kerried hum an' sol' it off spry. I s'pose the' was a kin' of a skeery flavor tu it made folks hanker arter it.

“ Wal, Beedy took on dreffly an' hed a tantry-

bogus fit on 'caount o' Cephas bein' killed an' eat up by wolves so 't there wa'n't 'nough on him left fer a fun'al, seacely. But she made 'em pick up the bones an' they took 'em hum an' there was quite a respectable fun'al considerin' the remains, wi' preachin' an' prayin' an' cryin'. An' Beedy, she hed a gravestun sot up, an', twixt hoein' an' hayin', she pulled up stakes an' went off somewhere, said she could n't stan' it tu stay where she 'd suffered sech a loss. But there was lots o' folks 'at did n't believe the' was no 'casion fer a fun'al. Cephas was turribly in debt an' his creditors a threatenin' tu jail him, — the' useter jail folks fer debt in them times, — an' he was awful skeered o' bein' shet up, an' so they cal'lated he 'd jest made a show o' bein' clawed an' chawed an' eat up, an' had cleared aout, an' Beedy 'd gone tu fin' him. An' the' was others 'at stuck to 't he 'd raly been killed. I do' know the rights on 't, mebby he was, an' mebby he wa'n't, but tew, three year arterward the' was a peddler, name o' Treuman Weeks, 'at useter travel over three, four States, come raound here an' he tol' tu the tarvern 'baout a feller 't he staid with, way aout in York State, 'at faound aout he 'd ben in these parts an' inquired turrible partieler 'baout everybody in Danvis. But the nub on 't was the feller said he 'd lived in Vermont forty year, a-warrin with God and wild beasts till they beat

him an' he 'd gi'n up an' put aout there, tu 'scape 'em. The feller's name as he gin it the' did n't nob'dy remember, but the peddler said he 'd allers remembered the name the feller called his wife, 't was sech a odd saounding one, Beedy. Puttin' this an' that together, folks s'mised 't was Cephas Worth, but I d' know. Why on airth," turning and peering out of the broad, low winder, "don't that Samwill come along hum?"

"Dat mek me rembler," cried Antoine, hastening to improve the first opportunity offered him to speak, "'baout one mans in Canada —"

"Consarn that everlastin' man in Canady," Uncle Lisha growled.

"But Ah 'll wan tol you 'baout it an' 'baout de loup garou dat was be mans wen hee 'll min' to, an' wolfs wen hee 'll min' to."

"Antwine, shet yer head. Samwill 's comin' an' he 'll hev suthin' wuth a-tellin'."

The noise of stamping feet was heard on the doorstep, and Samuel entered. All eyes were turned inquiringly upon him, for he wore the triumphant air of one who bears important tidings.

"Wal?" Uncle Lisha laconically voiced the impatience of the audience.

"Arter a good deal o' searchin', I faound the track an' follered it tu a spreuce cobble a mild east o' Joel's, an' I cal'late he 'll lay up there till he gits hungry ag'in. I've tol' ev'ybody 'long

my way hum, an' naow you fellers want to start right straight aout an' pass raound word to ev'y-body to rally in the mornin' an' meet at Joel Bartlett's. S'posin' Solon an' Jozeff notify the folks up their way an' Antwine them up his 'n, an' Peltier daown west, an' as soon 's I get a bite o' suthin' tu eat, I 'll go over to the store where there 'll be a lot a-loafin' raound 'at I can send word to heaps o' folks. It's airly in the evenin' an' the 's time tu raoust aout a party 'at 'll make it lively for the ol' wolf. Turn 'em aout, Uncle Lisher."

The visitors arose to depart, Antoine sighing as he went.

"Ah 'll hope it ain't one loup garou. Ah 'll goin' tol' you 'baout dat, firs' chance Ah 'll gat of it."

"Make it a p'int tu stop int' Varney's an' tell him 'baout the wolf hunt, Peltier," Lisha whispered, as he followed his visitors to the door. He watched them depart their several ways in the moonlight, and then looked up to the star-bejeweled sky.

"It's clear as a Christian's conscience an' not a breath a-stirrin'. I s'pose I might go aout an' holler the news in the doo'yard so 't some on 'em c'ld hear it. But I might skeer the wolf an' so I guess I 'll go tu bed. It 'll be a good day fer the hunt, Sam."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HUNTING OF THE WOLF.

THE morning sunlight had not touched the tree-tops of the crest of the western Danvis hills, when half of the arms-bearing population of the township were arriving at, or tending toward, the appointed gathering-place, some in sleighs, some on foot, each bearing some sort of firearm. The morning was not far spent, when a formidable force had gathered about the premises of Joel Bartlett, a strangely warlike array to be mustered in those peaceful precincts, yet Joel beheld it with a kindly and approving eye as he stood in the doorway, with Jemima peering timidly out behind him.

“It’s a heavy weight on my mind to see so many men bearin’ carnal weepsons,” she said with a very audible sigh; “it seems too much like the marshalin’ of the hosts for battle.”

“But thee sees, Jemimy, it hain’t for no puppus of sheddin’ humern blood ner even for larnin’ an’ practysein’ the weeked art o’ war, but jest tu quell the ravenous beasts of the wilderness, which

can't be wrought upon by the Word nor by returnin' good for evil."

"Yes, I s'pose thee's right, Joel; but I can't help my mind a-dwellin' on what guns was mostly made for, in times formerly. Ah, me. But, Joel, won't thee tell these good folks to come in an' get some nut cakes and cheese if any on 'em has occasion. Some must have eat breakfast uncommon airy this mornin'."

Joel loosened the pucker of his lips, and loudly proclaimed the "invite," which was accepted with great alacrity by many who stood in no need of refreshment, and with more diffidence by some who already were reminded they had breakfasted at an unwonted hour.

"Wal, I guess abaout ev'ybody's got here 'at's comin'," Sam Lovel said, after a careful survey of the roads and cross-lot bypaths, "an' we'd better choose a captain an' be a-moggin'. I move we hev Captain Peck for aour captain. Half his comp'ny's here an' 'll foller his orders nat'rally."

"If they don't du better 'n they du tu trainin', it'll take a corp'ral tu ev'ry private tu keep 'em in line," said John Dart, struggling with a dry mouthful of doughnuts and cheese. "Then, ag'in, he hain't no hunter. We want you, Lovel."

"No, it'll look better tu hev Captain Peck," Sam insisted; "you secont him, Dart."

"Wal, I don't care. I secont Cap'n Peck, wif Sam Lovel for leftenant."

"You hear the nommernation," Solon Briggs said, taking upon himself the office of moderator. "As'el Peck for captin' of this hunt, wi' Samwill Lovel for leftenant, sort of aidycong to give advices and et cetera. You that's in favor, say 'aye,' contrary minded, say 'no.' The ayes have it, an' you chose the above-mentioned to serve you, as here to before stated."

Captain Peck, a brisk little man, somewhat swelled up with the importance of his dual offices, held a brief consultation with Sam, and then in his biggest military voice, usually reserved for trainings, gave the order, "Fall in, men," and, presently, "Forrid, march," and the motley company, numbering a hundred or more, went forward in disorderly ranks toward the objective point.

"You must stop your gab, men," Sam continually insisted, as he passed along the talkative line, "erless you'll skeer that aire wolf clean tu N' Hampshire. You hain't got nothin' to say but what'll keep till we git a line araound the cobble, an' then you c'n shoot off your maouths as much as you're a min' ter."

A half hour's march brought them to the foot of a rocky hill densely clad with a black growth of spruce and fir, whose blue shadows deepened into a twilight obscurity that the infrequent shafts of sunlight pierced but to make the deeper. Three sides abutted on partially cleared fields, the

other swept up with a long curve to the steeper declivities of the mountain.

The triple column, now separated in two single files, one led by Captain Peck, the other by Sam, began to inclose the hillock. When the leaders met on the further side, without discovering the outgoing track of the wolf, word was passed that the circuit was completed, and the order given for the men to take proper distances and move toward the centre. Gradually the circle narrowed. The gloomy depths of thicket after thicket were invaded and passed. Each moment, the more excitable hunters grew nervous with expectation, the cooler, more steadily alert. To some, every moving shadow took on a wolfish semblance; steadfast rocks and stumps became endowed with grim, alert life; now a gun was leveled to an unsteady aim and its useless discharge forestalled by the sharp, peremptory caution of some clear-eyed and cool-headed veteran, till at last the word came too late to prevent one careless shot, which was the signal for a scattered fusilade from various posts of the encircling line.

The random firing aroused the wolf from his lair and sent him sneaking from one border of his constricted limits to find another as effectually guarded against his passage. Then he swept around the circle, searching with eager eyes for some vulnerable point, disclosing fleeting glimpses

of himself that drew upon him occasional shots, which increased his long, regular lopes to a wild, scurrying flight, now bounding from side to side of the cordon, now skirting it in an agony of fear, whimpering as he ran, now halting, half cowering, while he looked in vain for some loop-hole of escape.

Once, as he thus crouched for an instant, Sam's quick eye caught sight of him, and, taking an instantaneous aim, he saw the sight shining in bright relief against the dark gray fur of the wolf's side. As he felt the trigger yielding to the pressure of his finger, his heart filled with anticipated success, but, with the dull click that was the only response to the fall of the striker, it collapsed and sank like a plummet.

"Cuss them caps o' Clapham's," he groaned wrathfully, "if one on 'em ever does go, I wish he might be shot with it."

A shot from Captain Peck's gun cut loose a shower of evergreen twigs above the wolf, who cringed beneath their light downfall and then sprang away, vanishing like the shadow of a wind-tossed branch in the gloom of the thicket.

Pelatih's post was on the valley side of the hill where he had caught sight of the wolf several times, and once had taken a hasty and ineffectual shot. It had all happened in a flash, and he was confusedly trying to remember whether he fired

at the wolf or into the tree-tops, and to formulate an excuse for his miss that should be satisfactory to himself as well as to others, when he was startled by a sudden crash of dry twigs on the crest of the ledge just above him, and almost at the same instant he saw the animal flying at full speed down the sharp declivity directly behind him, so close upon him that he could only think to shout lustily and brandish his gun to scare the brute back into the woods, but it only swerved a little from its course and rushed madly on.

Not many paces to Pelatiah's left stood Beri Burton, as gaunt and grim as the wolf himself, and so transfixed with surprise at the sudden apparition that he stood stock still, his large jaws agape till the wolf was within his gun's length of him, and he stepped backward to make way. His heel caught a fallen branch, and he fell sprawling on his back. The wolf, snapping and gnashing his white fangs, swept over his prostrate form, and, clear at last of the perilous cordon, sped away toward the hills.

Pelatiah vainly attempted to cover him with a pottering aim for a moment, then took the track, and presently disappeared among the blue shadows and gray tree trunks.

Beri Burton slowly got upon his feet, sputtering and mumbling, till, having come to as intelli-

gible speech as was possible to him, he shouted loudly : —

“ Wolf gone. Wolf gone ter Jerooslum. Gol dumb sech er wolf.” Then as one and another of the party came hastening up, he related again and again the incidents of the wolf’s escape. “ Gol dumb sech er wolf. Run kerchug right ergin me an’ knocked me over, kerwolopp. Flopped one foot int’ my maouth. Wisht I ’d bit foot off. Yes, sir, flopped dumb foot right square in my maouth.”

“ Can’t blame him as I knows on,” said John Dart. “ He ’d got tu put his foot somewheres.”

“ By the gre’t horn spoon ! we ’re a smart lot o’ men,” said Sam, joining the gathering group, “ to let that wolf git away from us in that way. All Adams an’ Pocock ’ll be pokin’ fun at us fer a year to come.”

“ Why did n’t some o’ you smartins shoot him, then ? ” Beri growled ; “ hed chances ’nough, I reckon, by the bang-whangin’. Gol dumb sech shootin’.”

“ Don’t seem ’s ’ough Adams an’ Pocock hed no ’casion to laugh,” said Joseph Hill. “ It wa’n’t their wolf, leastways it hain’t got the earmark er brand o’ ary one o’ the towns, fer ’s I c’n see.”

“ ’Tain’t aour wolf nuther, fer ’s appears,” said Sam. “ But what way did he head ? ”

Where 's Peltier? Someb'dy said he seen him last."

"Dumb fool 's chasin' on him," Beri mumbled, "'Spec he 's goin' tu ketch him, prob'ble."

"Peltier was mos' crazy in hees head," Antoine explained. "He was kanna he-widder, cos hees gal goin' leff him, 'fore he 'll got marree to-gedder."

"His head 's straighter 'n aourn on this business," said Sam, "an' we might as well mog along arter him. The hunt is up for tu-day. But the critter may lay up on Hawg's Back to-night an' give us a chance to-morrer."

And so the dejected and disappointed wolf hunters made their way into the clearing, each one loudly blaming every one else, and himself silently and less satisfactorily, for the barren result of the hunt.

On the morning of the great hunt there were at least two non-participants, who through being such were quite as heavy-hearted as were now any of the baffled hunters. Uncle Lisha sighed heavily as he returned to the shop after the last of several tours of observation which he made into the back yard, where he could look across the fields to the rendezvous and see the men already clustering in knots in Joel Bartlett's yard, and hear the subdued jangle of arriving bells.

“Ho, hum, I’m tew short-winded and stiff-j’inted tu keep within hollerin’ distance of the oldest an’ laziest on ’em, an’ I might jest as well seddaown an’ go tu work, but I wisht a feller’s laigs would n’t grow ol’ no faster ’n his speerits. Ho, hum!” and settling himself into his seat, he picked up his board, leather, and knife, and endeavored to lose sight of age and infirmities in the intricacies of his craft.

Aunt Jerusha looked in through the open kitchen door, and seeing his hands resting idly on the board, and his eyes staring abstractedly out of the window, she said in a coaxing voice:—

“What makes ye try to work, Lisher? I would n’t ef I was you. The’ hain’t no men folks workin’ to-day. Put on yer kwut an’ hat an’ mittens an’ go over to Joel’s. You c’n see ’em start an’ git the fust news when they come back. Would n’t you, Huld’y?”

“Sartainly. It’ll do you good an’ I sh’d like to go myself,” Huldah said encouragingly, as she looked in over Aunt Jerusha’s shoulder, and the baby, pushing between their skirts, scrambled over to the old man, bearing one of his mittens in his milk teeth.

“Wal, I swan, ef bubb’y an’ the hull kit on ye are sot on gittin’ red on me, I guess I’ll hafter.” And so smiling down upon the crowing child, as he donned his outdoor gear, he trudged forth across the fields.

"It's a mighty pooty idee 'at I hain't a goin' tu turn aout along wi' the rest on 'em. Tew ol'? Hain't so spry 's I useter be? I'm younger an' spryer 'an you be, Joe Hill, ef I be risin' eighty-seben." So Gran'ther Hill growled and roared as he stamped to and fro across the kitchen in his stocking feet, glowering at his son's abashed face, as at each turn it was brought within range of his angry eyes.

"Don't seem's 'ough it 'ould be noways best, father," Joseph feebly argued, "it's tew exposin'; you'd get rheumatiz an' neurology."

"Rheumatiz an' ol' rology more like. Ef I got 'em they wouldn't hurt me none. A man 'at's marched tu Canady in the winter hain't agoin' tu be skeered aouten a wolf hunt by a pain in his laigs er a toothache, 'specially when he hain't got no teeth. Naow, look a-here, Jozeff," turning before his son and assuming a less aggressive tone, "I've got to go an' show 'em haow. The' hain't a man jack on 'em 'at knows beans about wolf huntin', never see a wolf an' would n't know one if they did see him. 'Tain't no ways likely the' is a wolf, but ef the' is, he'd orter be hunted as he'd ortu be."

"Jes' so, father," said Joseph, catching hopefully at the veteran's skepticism, "I don't b'lieve the' is no wolf, an' the' hain't no need o' you er nob'dy else's goin'; 'tain't nothin' on'y dawgs."

“You must be a idjit, Jozeff Hill, tu think ’at dawgs ’ould kill sheep in the way them was killed. I tell ye it’s a wolf, an’ by the Lord Harry I’m goin’ tu help kill the cussed varmint. Gi’ me that aire gun.”

“The’ hain’t a ball er a spoo’ful o’ shot in the haouse, father.”

“That’s almighty pooty haousekeepin’; no shot ner ball? You’d a tarnal sight better be ketched wi’out tea an’ sugar, yes, or rum, ’an wi’out ammernition. Bub, where’s yer fish lines? Fetch me ev’y sinker you got.”

The younger Josiah obeyed the order with an alacrity stimulated by a desire to further his grandfather’s purposes, which, if carried out, might make him his necessary attendant.

“I would n’t go if I was you, father,” pleaded his daughter-in-law, “it’s tew hard fer you, an’ then ag’in, I want you tu stay an’ ta’ care o’ me.”

“You don’t need nob’dy. The wolf hain’t a-goin’ tu come in the haouse an’ eat you. Jozeff c’n stay.”

“But you see, father, I sorter promised tu go, an’ I’ve got tu.”

“So hev I got tu. Gimme my boots.”

“Father,” said the son, playing his last card, with an air of deep dejection, “I’m turrible sorry, but I took ’em over to Uncle Lisher’s las’ night tu git ’em mended;” and he breathed a silent

prayer, "The Lord forgive me fer lyin' an' keep me from gittin' ketched at it."

"You etarnal, infarnal, meddlin' idjit," his father roared, his voice shaken with anger, "haow dast ye send my boots to git mended? Haow 'd you know I wanted 'em mended, say? It does beat hell amazin'ly, what tarnal luck I did hev, a bringin' on ye up. I don't wisht you was dead, but I swear, I wisht I had n't never hed ye. Clear aout. Go an' hunt yer tarnal wolf, but ye shan't take my gun. Not a step aouten this haouse does that aire gun go, 'thout me a ker-ryin' on 't. You c'n take Bub's bow-arrer, it's good 'nough fer you. Er borry Joel Bartlett's ol' britch-burnt, hang-fire, Quaker gun. Yeou shoot a wolf, Lordermighty!"

Joseph fled in dismay from the rattling volley of his father's wrath, nor stayed his steps till they brought him to the meeting place, while his wife, with all the children but the eldest boy, retreated into the fastnesses of the pantry. Little Josiah, secure in his position as his grandfather's favorite, remained, the sole and undismayed spectator of the old man's rage.

"Blast 'em. Kerryin' off my boots," the veteran fumed, still pacing the rounds of the kitchen. "I'm a good minter go in my stock-in' feet, jes tu spite 'em. I hope the Lord it hain't nothin' but a dawg. The idjits would n't know the diffunce."

The boy held out two plummets of hammered lead and one half bullet. "What was you goin' to do wi' 'em?"

"Load this 'ere gun wi' 'em," was the hoarsely whispered reply. "I 've made killin' shots at two-legged and four-legged varmints wi' wus slugs 'an these. Gimme me a holt on 'em an' I'll load her jest fer the fun on 't." He took the big gun from its hooks and carefully measured in his palm a charge of powder from the great ox-horn, poured it into the barrel and wadded it with tow, dropped the sinkers in one by one, wadded them and primed the piece, while the boy's eyes closely followed every movement.

Maria heard the clang and thud of the iron ramrod and peered anxiously through the pantry door.

"Why, father, what be you a-duin'?"

"I 'm gittin' ready tu ta' keer on ye ag'in' the wolf tackles ye, M'rier," he chuckled scornfully. "Shet the door, M'rier, an' 'tend tu yer cookin'; me an' Bub's stan'in' guard." He fondled the gun and wiped the dust from the barrel with his coat sleeve, and aimed at the clock.

"Du ye wanter go awfle, gran'ther?" whispered Josiah.

The old man nodded his head repeatedly without withdrawing his aim from the centre of the clock face.

“Sh-h-h, I know where your boots be. In the paoundin’ berrel in the back shed. I’ll fetch ’em when ma goes down sullen arter the ’taters.”

The grandsire’s slow, senile stare gradually gave way to a look of intelligence, and the two conspirators, in pantomime, enjoined secrecy.

Wondering at the sudden silence, Maria peeped through a cranny of the door and saw the old man quietly seated in his chair, and called to him as she bustled about her work:—

“I’m turrible glad you gin it up so sensible, father.”

“Sho, I hedn’t no idee a-goin’. I was jest a-foolin’ Jozeff. Ketch me a-goin’ dawg huntin’ along wi’ that mess o’ idjits,” and he winked hard at his grandson, who, under cover of the stove, was growing red with smothered mirth.

“My sakes,” said Maria, coming out and looking at the clock, “I mus’ git the pertaters and put that fish a-fresh’nin’.”

As her step was heard on the last cellar stair, Josiah stole out to the back shed and presently appeared with the boots, which his grandfather drew on in tremulous haste, while the boy, after driving the small children back into the pantry and closing the door upon them, brought the old man’s hat and cane.

“Hain’t it lucky Ruby’s over to Briggses?”

Hurry up, gran'ther. Ma'll be up in a minute," he whispered as he hovered about the ancestral chair in a fever of excitement. Then he opened the door and the old man passed out as noiselessly as his stiff joints would let him, with his long gun trailed in careful avoidance of lintel and posts, just as the muffled thud of the last potato announced the filling of the pan.

"Can't I go with you, gran'ther?" Josiah asked eagerly; but his heart sank as he read refusal written in the stern yet half-regretful face bent upon him.

"Could n't nohaow, sonny; 't would n't du any good an' might du hurt. Them idjits 'll shoot awful keerless an' might hit you. You gwup an' look aouten the saouth garret winder, an' you c'n see Haidge Hawg Cobble where they say the wolf's lyin' up. Naow go an' tell 'em I've gone aout tu the barn, an' so I hev, an' mebbly a leetle beyend." He gave the boy an approving pat on the head that gave some comfort, though it drove the coarse seal-skin cap over his eyes.

The veteran's departure was covered by the barn from the observation of the inmates of the house. As he plodded across the snowy fields his thoughts went back to the old days of humble, unrequited heroism, when he marched with Warner and his Green Mountain boys to Canada. In a misty day dream he saw the frozen level of

Champlain stretching in lifeless loneliness behind the rangers' march, the wintry gloom and desolation of the forest opening to them the only path beyond. He heard again the click and swish of snowshoes, the low, cautious word of command drifting back along the triple files. For a little space it quickened his pulse and pace, and for a moment he was young again, till, tired by climbing a high rail fence, he leaned against the nearest stump to rest, and realized that he was but a feeble old man, the superannuated, sole survivor of the band, to follow whom, he lingered a little on the verge of the eternal mystery.

"A goo' for nothin' ol' critter as orter stay tu hum wi' women an' young uns," he sighed, half minded to turn back, when his eye was caught by a moving speck far away toward Hedge Hog Cobble. Something familiar in the movements of the distant object drew upon it the veteran's closest scrutiny.

"That hain't no dawg, it's tew big fer a fox. By the Lord Harry, it's a wolf, an' he's a-comin' stret tu me."

He sank stiffly behind the stump and cocked his gun while he steadfastly watched the beast's swift approach. Now he could see the wild, cunning eyes, now the red tongue hanging slavering from the white-fanged jaws, and now he aimed, with all the skill that eye and nerve could com-

mand, just before the pointed nose, and with a prayer as devout as he ever uttered, pulled the trigger, as with swift, long lopes the wolf ran past, fifty yards away. With a snarling yelp, a long, floundering fall, and a quicker recovery of his feet, with a broken foreleg helplessly dangling, the wolf charged wildly at the fence, clung a moment to the top rail, fell back, and then plunged at the nearest but too narrow interstice between the rails. The impetus of the leap drove him halfway through, but there he was caught at the hips. He pushed desperately with the uninjured foreleg and clawed vainly with his hind feet for a hold on the nether rail, and was slowly worming his way through, when Gran'ther Hill pounced upon him, seizing him by both hindlegs, and, bracing his own feet against the fence, he held on and shouted lustily for help at the top of his high-pitched, cracked voice.

The wolf writhed from side to side, and snapped his wicked jaws within two feet of his captor's hands, without being able to harm him, but his struggles were fast exhausting the strength of the old man, who, almost in despair, saw the prize slipping, inch by inch, through the fence.

Then he heard rapid steps, and turning his head he saw Pelatiah's lank figure close beside him.

"Ketch a holt here, quick," he gasped.

Pelatiah lent one strong hand to his relief, and the old man loosed his hold. Snatching the gun from Pelatiah, he staggered to the fence, and, with a cruelly deliberate aim at three feet range, bored the wolf's skull with the heavy charge of buckshot. "There," he panted, as with a grim smile he regarded the last struggles of his victim when Pelatiah had drawn it forth from the fence, "he knows naow what he gits by runnin' ag'in' a real ol'-fashioned hunter. S'pose he cal'lated the' wa'n't none left, an' the' hain't on'y one. But I'm almighty glad you come, young Gove, fer I was nigh abaout tuckered, an' ef I hed tu let go, the critter might ha' flummixed along a good piece afore I e'ld ha' loaded up. Good Lord," he gasped, aghast at the sudden recollection that he had no ammunition, "I hed n't another charge. Wal, I be glad you come, young Gove. Where's the rest of the idjits? Git up on ter the fence an' holler like a loon."

Pelatiah's triumphant shouts soon brought in the foremost of the straggling pursuers, who, as they beheld the dead wolf and heard the story of his death, were variously moved with admiration of his slayer's prowess and chagrin for their own lack of it.

"By the gret horn spoon!" cried Sam, stroking the wolf's gaunt side almost tenderly and looking up at the old man's serenely happy face,

"I'd ha' gi'n the ol' Ore Bed¹ tu ha' shot the critter myself, but I do' know but I 'm gladder you done it, Cap'n Hill."

"I reckon 'at my chances is gittin' a leetle scaser 'n yourn, Sammy. But you might profit more by them 'at you git, ef I'd hed the bringin' on you up. I consait you hed the makin's of a hunter in ye ef ye 'd on'y hed me er even Peleg Sunderlan' tu eddicate your nat'ral gifts."

"Hooray for Danvis!" roared John Dart as he came upon the scene. "Adams, ner Pocock, ner nary other town can twit us o' losin' aour wolf naow, Lovel. I was growin' shameder an' shameder tu meet any on 'em, an' was studyin' more lies tu tell 'em 'an I c'd ever ben forgive fer under any circumstances. You 've saved the credit of your taown, Cap'n Hill, an' mebbby my soul."

"Gol dumb sech savin'," Beri Burton growled. "Danvis hain't got much tu brag on when it's got tu ressureck the dead a'most, tu kill a wolf."

"Shet yer head," Dart growled savagely.

"An' call aout the infants," Beri persisted. "He would n't er shot er wolf if that aire shimble-shanked Gove boy hed n't er hel' his laigs."

"He'd waounded him, so 't he could n't but jest go, an' he'd got him e'en a'most killed when I come up," Pelatiah magnanimously protested.

¹ A famous gun, so called for its great weight.

"It was some pooty good lucky dat wolf 's ant be one loup garou. You 'll can' keel dat kan o' wolfs 'less you 'll shot it wid silver ball."

"Wal, I swan that was lucky," said Dart; "I don't b'lieve you could rake up a charge o' silver amongst the hull bilin' of us. I don't s'pose copper change 'll pass wi' them aire thingumbobs, would it, Antwine? Wal, le' 's stop our gab an' start aour caravan. We 've got tu show tu the village this arternoon. Where 's Cap'n Peck?"

"Skinned it fer hum, half an hour ago," some one answered.

"Wal, let him go. I was goin' tu propose 'at we fired a s'lute, but nev' mind. Who 's got a gun 's long 's Cap'n Hill's? Fetch it here. Lay it daown 'longside o' his'n. Naow, lay the wolf top on 'em. Naow, Cap'n Hill, you set top o' the wolf."

"Yis, du! Yis, du!" other voices shouted with Dart. The hero of the day rather reluctantly complied.

"Ketch a holt o' the muzzles, Lovel, an' I 'll take the butts. Up he goes," and the veteran hunter and his grim quarry were lifted aloft and borne forward, amid the cheers of the party.

"What 's up?" Joseph Hill panted, breathless with his exertions to overtake his comrades.

"Your superannual, ancient sire is, Jozeff," said Solon, "him an' the wolf. Hain't you hearn how he slewed him?"

“Good Lord,” Joseph groaned; recognizing the elevated countenance of his father, his eyes anxiously sought his feet.

Catching sight of him the old man bent upon him a frown, the severity of which was somewhat softened by the pride of his achievement, and laughed down at him scornfully, “You ondutiful leetle cuss, you hid my boots, did you? Did you s’pose a man ’at had took Ticonderogue an’ fit tu Ben’n’t’n an’ went tu Canady ’long wi’ Seth Warner an’ hunted Tories wi’ Peleg Sunderlan’, couldn’t smell aout his own boots? You must be a almighty smart boy.”

Though conscious that his artifice was justified by his headstrong father’s infirmities, Joseph fell to the rear in confusion, and the procession continued its triumphal progress to Joel Bartlett’s.

Uncle Lisha had waddled forth to meet it, roaring a welcome that was heard at every house in the neighborhood. When Joel beheld the grim trophy he was startled from his accustomed propriety, by the whistle that escaped unwittingly from the long-puckered lips.

“Friends,” he said, chanting in the monotonous tune to which his sermons were set, “I feel to thank you, one an’ all, for a-girdin’ on your swords an’ a-goin’ forth tu battle against the beasts of the field which they ravage aour folds, an’, as it ware, spile our barnyards. I thank you, friends, fer

a-stretchin' forth your carnal weepsons in behalf of a man whose ways has ben more led untu the plowshare an' the prunin' hook 'an tu the sword an' the spear. There 's suthin' due more 'n thanks tu mortal man, an' I feel it bore in on me tu ask you, one an' all, tu enter my haouse" (as he paused and ran his eye over the company, as if making a mental computation of its numbers and capacity, more than one hungry stomach yearned for the anticipated offering of doughnuts and cheese), "an' git into the quiet an' render silent thanks tu Him 'at has been pleased to reward your indivors with victory. Arter which," Joel continued after a solemn pause, "Jemimy, my wife, will pervide some sustenance for your carnal bodies, tu which you will be most welcome."

Few were inclined to accept the invitation to a repast, the first course whereof was likely to be long and unsatisfying to their present need, and so with thanks and excuses almost all hastened to avail themselves of the more exhilarating and substantial refreshments that were to be found at the tavern and store.

Gran'ther Hill's crown of laurels was further weighted with fresh contributions, some sprigs of which he generously permitted to adorn the youthful brow of Pelatiah, and was more content to enrobe himself in the misty glories of the past alone than to share these present, flimsy honors with another.

CHAPTER IX.

HASTY PUDDIN'.

DESERTION by its men folks had not brought complete quiet to the Lovel homestead, any more than to others that day similarly deserted in Danvis, for the women's tongues enjoyed unrestrained freedom to wag at will.

Aunt Jerusha fully realized the privilege, when, after stopping at the shop window to watch her husband's slow progress across the fields, she re-entered the kitchen, and, seating herself restfully in her favorite chair, she took out her snuffbox and regaled herself with a long-inhaled pinch of the fragrant powder, to which she in turn invited each nostril with impartial twists of her mouth from side to side. When she had returned the box to the deep pocket and fumbled forth her copperas-checked, homespun handkerchief, she settled back in her chair and made declaration:—

“I will say, Huldy, 'twixt you an' me an' the whippin' pos', 'at it's a raal comfort onete in a while tu be clean red o' men folks. Not tu say but what I set store by well-behaved men folks, sech as aourn' be, an' consider 'em a necessary

blessin', but you do git el'yed o' the best o' things arter tew long spells."

Huldah picked up the baby from the floor, seated him on her lap, wiped his chubby cheeks with a moistened corner of her apron, and kissed them with long inhalations of their subtle fragrance that only a mother can catch, before she answered.

"I 'spect 'at th' was a time when you could n't hev tew much of Uncle Lisher, an' begun to hanker arter him the minute he was out of sight."

The russet of the wrinkled cheeks was tinged with a faint blush that kindled a responsive glow in Huldah's conscious face, and both laughed an acknowledgment of the touch of nature that makes youth and age akin.

"I hain't denyin' young folkses' foolishness, but that don't signify. What I du say is, 'at when folks gits settled daown to the tussle o' livin', there be times when it's restin' tu hev men folks aouten the way. Women wants a chance tu talk about their consarns, an' argy their own way. Somehaow men can't argy, but keep a-givin' their reasons an' their whys an' wherefores. Women know a thing is so, an' jest stick tu it, an' thet's argyin' 'at gin'ally fetches men araound er shets 'em up, which answers the puppus."

"Yes," Huldah concluded, as she trotted her

boy at arm's length and looked at him in absorbed admiration, "I s'pose the common run o' men folks is sot an' onreasonable, but it does n't seem 's 'ough Sam was, on'y mebb'y a leetle grain 'baout goin' huntin' an' sech."

"Wal, I can't say 'at father is nuther, not in a gin'ral way, ner yet yer father Lovel. Semanth'y argy'd him aouten that. But all men folks ain't like aourn, an' I like tu git shet of even them oncte in a while, an' have a raal ri' daown womern's talk. I do' know as I enj'yed it much wi' George's wife, 'cause she was everlastin'ly blamin' George, which went ag'in' my gizzard; fer if there ever was a 'commerdatin', clever man, George is, if he is my son, an' she'd orter know it. But with you, Huld'y, I enj'y talkin'." So they fell into comforting discourse, which continued until Huldah became aware that the fire was burning low, and a glance at the clock apprised her that it was drawing toward noon.

"My sakes!" she cried, hastily setting the baby on the floor and rising with the same movement, "ef it hain't jest warnin' fer twelve an' I hain't done a stroke 'baout dinner."

"Wal, Huld'y, it don't signify. Le' 's don't git a reg'lar dinner, but jest make us a cup o' tea an' hev a col' bite; the' hain't no men folks tu be p'tic'lar."

"I tell ye what," said Huld'y, moved with a

sudden inspiration, "le' 's hev some hasty puddin'. I ben hankerin' arter some this ever so long, but Sam says it 's dog-robbin', an' father Lovel, he don't like it. You like it, don't you?"

"Good land, guess I du. The' hain't no hul-somer ner cleaner-tasted victuals, ner cheaper ner easier got. Lisher likes it, tew, but he says it don't stay by him none, an' ef he 's goin' tu eat puddin' an' milk fer supper he wants tu ondress him fust an' sit on the aidge o' the bed an' swaller it as quick as he can, an' then tumble in an' go tu sleep afore he gits hungry. My land, these 'ere apples is a-dryin' complete," as she ran her hand along the tawny festoons and critically pinched some of the lower quarters, "they feel raal luthery a'ready. Be you goin' tu sell 'em tu Clapham er trade 'em off tu peddlers? I s'pose you can't git cash nary way."

"They say they pay cash for 'em tu V'gennes, an' I 'm goin' tu coax Sam tu take 'em down there when he sells his fur," Huldah said, amid the clatter of setting the kettle of water on the stove.

"Wal, so I would; the' hain't no sense in lettin' Clapham er peddlers make tew profits on sech barter. Du you wet up your meal in col' water fust er stir it right in when the water biles?"

"Oh, I stir it right int' the kittle as soon as it biles," said Huldah, bringing the pudding-stick

and the basin of meal, "an' I salt it well when it's abaout as thick as gruel."

"So du I," and the old woman nodded emphatic approval of the dry meal method. "It's more partic'lar work and there's more danger of it's bein' lumpy; but it need n't be, if you're keerful tu sprinkle in slow an' keep a-stirrin' the same way all the time. I think it's tastier made so. Old ways is best ways as a gin'ral thing. But, law sakes, I du despise lumpy puddin'. Crumbles o' dry meal breakin' up in your maouth an' chokin' you, when you're expectin' nourishment!"

She critically watched Huldah as she sifted the meal into the seething kettle with one hand and stirred it with rapid turns of the other, while the wholesome fragrance of the boiled meal and the parching of the few grains scattered on the stove began to diffuse itself through the room. Then when the stick was lifted and dripped its burden in an even stream, her face relaxed to an expression of satisfaction.

"It's as smooth as 'lasses, Huldah. Naow be you goin' to make a lawful puddin'?"

"I never heard abaout no law fer puddin'."

"Wal, there was in Connect'cut in an airly day. Ye see most ev'ybody 'at was anyways forehanded useter hev 'printice boys an' gals bound tu 'em till they come of age, an' some on

'em useter keep th' 'printices on hasty puddin', an' made it so thin 'at it wa'n't much more 'n gruel an' starved the poor creeturs so 't they would n't sca'cely make a shadder; an' so the Leegislatur passed a law 'at they got tu make hasty puddin' so thick 'at the puddin' stick 'ould stan' right up in the middle of the kittle. But I'd ruther not have it quite so thick fer me tu eat, bein' 'at I hain't a 'printice gal. You've got it thick 'nough. Naow set it on the back o' the stove an' let it blubber a spell. Oh, hum suzzy day! Haow that blubberin' kittle o' b'ilin' hot puddin' does kerry me back tu ol' times, when the bear come right int' the haouse an' tipped over aour kittle o' puddin'. Did n't I ever tell ye on 't? Wal, 't was when I was a gal an' we lived in a lawg haouse, an' father an' mother 'd gone off tu see a sick neighbor an' left us young uns tu keep haouse. But we let the haouse keep itself pooty much, an' hed high jinks till it got tu be 'long in the arternoon, an' the childern begin tu git hungry, an' I sot tu make a kittle o' puddin' fer 'em. Wal, I'd took it off 'n the trammel an' sot it on the hairth tu cool, an' the childern was stan'in' 'raoun' wi' the' maouths a-waterin' an' the' wooden bowls an' pewter spoons in the' hands, when I ketched a glimpse of a shadder tu the open door, an', lookin' raound, what did I see but a gret, monst'ous bear a-lookin' in at

us. My, if I did n't hustle them young uns up the ladder int' the charmber an' I up arter 'em an' pulled the ladder up arter, quicker 'n scat. We c'd hear the critter's claws clicken along the floor towards the fireplace, an' when we got over bein' scairt a leetle, we peeked daown through the cracks an' seen him go up tu the kittle an' smell on 't. Then he poked his nose in an' lapped a mou'ful, an' he kinder squealed aout an' lapped his chops. He made at it ag'in an' got burnt ag'in, an' that made 'him mad an' he hit the kittle a whack 'at sent it clean across the floor an' sent the puddin' flyin', fer it wa'n't lawful puddin', an' he got some on tu his feet, an', of course, it scalt him, an' you 'd orter seen that creetur dance araound an' whine an' suck his paws, julluk a boy wi' his finger pinched, an' we lay there an' snickered. He got a taste o' the puddin' an' took a sensible view o' the case, an' sot tu an' eat up ev'y smitch on 't, an' arter awhile went a-shoolin' off. We lost aour puddin', but we cal'lated we hed fun 'nough tu pay for 't. Ho, hum! Folks was thankful tu git hasty puddin' an' samp them times. Father an' mother come here jest afore the 'Sca'ce Year' when lots o' folks hed tu bile beech an' basswood leaves tu live on. Aour folks hed one caow 'at they fed on browse 'nough tu keep her givin' a leetle mess o' milk, an' father 'd ketch traout an' minnies an'

mother 'd kinder stew 'em in the milk an' they kep' soul an' body tugether on sech livin' till things took a turn. More 'n oncte next winter father went forty miles on his snowshoes tu git a bushel o' Injun meal an' left mother an' my oldest brother, not so ol' as bubbly here, wi' the wolves a haowlin' all araound the' lawg haouse. I wonder 'f aour men folks will git that aire wolf. Haow Gran'ther Hill will tew, 'cause he can't go. 'Course they won't let him, but I don't wanter be in M'rier's shoes this day. In course I'll draw up," and Aunt Jerusha hitched her rocking chair to the table and tasted her first mouthful of pudding and maple sugar, and still continued to discourse of the old pioneer days.

"Folks was glad an' thankful tu git hasty puddin' an' milk an' johnny-cake in them times, or even no-cake. You never hearn o' no-cake? Wal, that was parched corn paounded up in a mortar an' eat wi' milk ef they hed it, an' ef they hed n't, jest mixed up wi' water. They l'arnt that of the Injins, an' they lowed it 'ould stan' by a man longer 'n any other Injin corn fixin's. Then they uster make samp in the Plumpin' mill, big mortars they was, 'at went wi' a spring pole, an' they'd change off ontu samp when they got sick o' no-cake. Hasty puddin' an' johnny-cake they could n't hev, 'thout gittin' the corn graound tu a reg'lar mill, an' them was mebbly forty miled off

Bimeby they got tu raisin' wheat, an' then some folks begin to stick up the' noses at Injin. But aour folks did n't, 'cause they come f'm Rho' Dislan' an' allers sot gret store by all sorts o' Injin victuals. Father allers would hev his johnny-cake fer breakfus' an' hev it baked on a board, long after they hed 'em a stove. You never eat a johnny-cake baked on a board? You don't say. Wal, then, you do' know what johnny-cake is, Huldly. Haow did they make 'em? Wal, jest stirred up the meal wi' b'ilin' water an' salt, not tew thick ner tew thin, an' then spread it ontu a oak board 'at was made a-puppus, an' sot it up afore the fire, tilted a leetle mite at fust ag'in' a flat iron, an' kep' a-settin' it up stretter an' stretter till that side was done, an' then turn it over an' bake t' other side, an' all the time keep a-bastin' on 't wi' sweet cream, an' then eat it an' be thankful 'at the Lord made Injin corn tu grow an' give his creeturs the knowledge tu use it proper. But as I was sayin', the' was folks 'at got 'shamed o' eatin' Injin, 'cause once they 'd ben obleeged tu, an' they just turned the' backs on the' ol' friend they was so much beholden tu, jest as folks allers has, an' will. The' 's folks here now 'at won't tech Injin. They say Cap'n Peck hes got some three-pronged forks, an' they 're jest a-starvin' 'emselves tryin' tu eat their victuals wi' 'em, but i d' know. Haow father did useter laugh," she

continued meditatively, stirring the maple syrup into her saucer of pudding, "a-tellin' 'baout oncte when he went intu a neighbor's, an' they sot tu the table eatin' breakfus', an' he seen the womern ketch up suthin' an' hide it under her apron. Of course they ast him tu set by, an' he did, for all he'd jest eat, an' fust thing arter he'd set daown, he says, 'Molly Hackstaff, take that aire johnny-eake outen your apron, fer I want some,' an' she did. Most o' folks hes got over sech foolishness, but there's some 'at hain't an' denies 'emselves good hulsome victuals outen pride. But my land sakes, Bubby hain't a-goin' tu; du jest see that chil' reachin' fer the spoon faster 'n you give it tu him," and she looked intense approval of the baby's assaults upon the pudding, "an' his cheeks is all daubed wi' 'lasses, but it can't make 'em no sweeter, no, it can't. No, thank ye, I can't eat another maou'ful."

"Then, I guess," said Huldah, beginning hurriedly to clear away the few dishes, "I'll git the things washed up an' the puddin' kittle aout o' sight 'fore —"

"Why, Huld' Lovel," Aunt Jerusha laughed, "I du b'lieve you're afeared the men folks'll come hum an' find aout we ben hevin' hasty puddin'. Why, there's puddin' 'nough left for Drive's supper, ef you don't fry it fer breakfus', an' it is propper good fried."

The men did not return from the village till the evening chores called them. Huldah could scarcely share her husband's satisfaction in the achievement of Gran'ther Hill, for it seemed to her that the honor should rightfully have fallen to the mightiest hunter of Danvis. The supper-table talk and the later conversation around the glowing fire were all of the day's events, nor was the subject exhausted when some of the tired hunters, frequenters of the shop, began to drop in.

CHAPTER X.

LE LOUP GAROU.

"I DON'T see," Joseph began, as he fortified the unstable chair by setting its back against the wall, "haow father ever got a holt o' his boots when I'd hid 'em in the paoundin' berril, an' made him b'lieve they was over here a-bein' mended."

"It was a jedgment on ye fer lyin'," said Uncle Lisha.

"It wa'n't exactly lyin', 'cause I was cal'latin' tu fetch 'em over."

"Proberbly they was revealed tu him in a provision," Solon remarked.

"However he got 'em, I'm glad he did," said Sam with an emphatic squeak of the roll of sole leather on which he sat. "If he hed n't, we'd lost the wolf."

"Wal, he's tickleder 'an ef he'd hed his pension doubled an' was promisin' Josier five dollars o' the baounty fer his sinkers an' fer 'you knows what, bub,'" says he. "By geewhitteker," he ejaculated, his mind suddenly illumined, "I'll bet fo'pence ha'penny that aire boy ramshacked raound an' faound 'em fer him."

“I was kinder runnin’ things over in my mind arter you was here t’other night,” said Uncle Lisha, rolling a length of shoe thread on his aproned knee and then carefully splicing it to a split bristle, “an’ I got tu thinkin’ ’baout ol’ Bart Johnson’s scrape wi’ the wolves up on Tater Hill. He was a kinder half-cracked ol’ critter ’at useter come a-wanderin’ ’raoun’ here abaout oncte a year when I was a young feller, an’ useter stop tu aour haouse, off an’ on, fer a week or two at a time, an’ poke ’raoun’ on the maountain days, a-lookin’ fer his treasure, as he called it. He’d ben a soger in the ol’ French war, endurin’ which he went on a expedition ag’in’ the Canady Injins under a Major Rodgis, I b’lieve his name was. Wal, they s’prised the Injins an’ destr’yed the village an’ fetchted away lots o’ stuff ’at they’d got from aour folks, trinkets an’ silver an’ goold an’ money an’ a silver idolatry imidge ’at weighed more ’n twenty paounds — jest clean silver. Wal, off they started back, a-luggin’ the’ booty, wi’ a fresh lot o’ Injins arter ’em, so ’t they headed off toward the Connect’cut River. Pooty soon they begun tu git short o’ provision an’ they divided up inter small parties, each one shiftin’ fer himself, an’ they come tu terrible straits, grubbin’ fer rhuts an’ gnawin’ bark, an’ most on ’em hove away their plunder an’ hed n’t no thought o’ nothin’, on’y savin’ the’ mis’able lives, which

was more 'n some on 'em done. But ol' Bart hung tu what he 'd got, a lot o' money an' I do' know but the silver imidge, an' he wandered off by himself till he come tu the top of a high maountain, an' seen the lake an' knowed where Crown P'int was. An' he come daown this side a piece, an' bairied his stuff, an' arter a spell he got tu Crown P'int, nigher dead 'an he was alive. When the war was eended he begin tu look fer his plunder an' he consaited Tater Hill was the maountain he 'd left it on, an' so year arter year, as long as he lived, he 'd come an' s'arch an' s'arch fer the stuff 'at was goin' tu make a rich man on him. Some cal'lated it wa'n't but a crazy notion he 'd got intu his head when he was a-wanderin' in the woods, and some thought he raly hed hed suthin' of vally. One day he 'd ben a-s'archin' way up toward the haith o' land, till eenamost dark, an' 'fore he goddaown halfway tu a clearin' it was darker 'n a stack o' black cats wi' the' eyes put aout, an' then the wolves begin a-callin', an' a-screamin' *owooo* here and *owooo* there, drawin' in cluster on him, till he begin tu feel his hair a-liftin' on him, an' he clawed raound fer a tree he c'd climb, an' he run ag'in' one he c'd git his arms araound, an' he scrabbled an' buckled tu like a good feller, till he was clean aout o' breath an' kinder settled back onter a big limb 'at ketched him, an' there he sot a-huggin' the tree fer dear

life, his toes a-ticklin' an' his skelp a crawlin', ev'y yowl the wolves gin. An' so he sot the hul endurin' night, oncte in a while jes' savin' himself fr'm goin' tu sleep an' tumblin' off an' breakin' his neck, till bombye, arter abaout a week he thought, it come light, an' the wolves clearn aout an' he started tu climb daown, but he couldn't giddaown no further, fer lo an' behol'! he was a-settin' right on the rhuts o' the tree. Bart use-ter tell on 't an' laugh jest as hearty as any on us. Poor ol' critter, he died on the taown daown tu Lakefield an' his bairied riches never done him no good, 'thaout it was in expectin' on 'em, which is abaout all the sati'faction any on us gits."

"I should admire tu know if he ever tried the myraculous paower of a witch hazel crotch," said Solon. "I c'n find veins of water with 'em onfali-ble, an' the' hain't no daoubt 'at they hev jest as paowerful distraction tow-ards gold and silver, hid artificial, or growin' nat'ral in the baowels of the airth. Mebby he did find it an' spoke afore he got his hand on 't an' it moved. It sartinly will, ef you speak a audible laoud word. The' is allers a sperit a-guardin' bairied treasure, an' ef you speak afore you lay your hand on 't, it gives the sperit paower to move it, the' 's no tellin' haow fur."

"Oh, shaw, Solon," Uncle Lisha snorted, "that 's jest an' ol' granny notiern. Ef I struck

a chest o' money I should holler, I know I should, an' I'd resk even my hollerin' a-startin' on 't. I don't make no gret 'caount o' sperits guardin' nothin'. The nighest I ever knowed one come tu doin' anythin' good was — ”

“ O, bah gosh,” cried Antoine, who had just entered and was prancing about in a burning fever of impatience, “ Ah 'll ben hol' dat storeez 'baout de wolfs so long he mos' bust mah inside off. Ah 'll gat for be delliv'r of it 'fore Ah 'll died or fregit.”

“ It 's aither a lie er no 'caount, but let 's hev it ef it 'll save yer life, Ann Twine.”

Antoine dropped to his favorite seat on the floor and began cutting a charge of tobacco with frequent interruptions of gesticulations, now with his knife, now with his handful of tobacco, and many emphatic jerks of his head. “ Wal, seh, boy, one tam, mah fader's broder-law — ”

“ Must ha' come pooty nigh bein' your uncle,” Sam remarked.

“ Mah fader's broder-law,” Antoine repeated.

“ Wal, I s'pose hevin' brother-in-laws run in the fam'ly then, as naow.”

“ Sam, you shet up you beesiness. You Yan-kee tink it was be awfly beeg for feefty mans keel one wolf, but Ah goin' tol' you what mah fader's broder-law was be do, one tam. One naght, he 'll load off hees gaun wid four, prob'ly

tree ball an' han'ful of shot-buck an' he 'll took twenty-fav' foot rope, an' he 'll rrrubby rrrubby all wid hawg blood, he jes' be kéel, an' he 'll jomp on hees traine, hees cutters, you know, an' he 'll drove off on de hwood, wid mah fader for drove, an' drag dat ropes behin' de traine of it. An' bambye de wolfs beegin fer feel smell of it, an' he 'll scratter togedder an' foller dat traine, more as twenty, t'irty of it, an' den he 'll touch hol' dat ropes, one, two, tree, ten, feeften, so many, de hoss he mos' can' pull it. Wal, seh, den mah fader's broder-law, he pant hees gaun raght long dat ropes, an' he 'll shot, poom, an', seh, haow many you s'pose he 'll keel, ten of it, an' fav', he 'll go off flap, flap, guer-a-ouou, wid hees laig broke off an' hees jaw spile up for bit some more. Dat was de way in Canada, two mens keel ten wolfs, not feefty fer keel one, an' hol' mos'-dead-mans do it den."

"Ef it wa'n't fer spilin' this last," said Uncle Lisha, breaking the silence which followed this recital, "I'd knock yer lyin' head off with 't."

"Onc' Lasha, dat head can' lied," Antoine protested, between laborious puffs of his pipe. "Naow, wait till Ah 'll goin' tol' you baout de loup garou. Ah dat was so bad ting, it mek me scare for tink of it ever sen Ah 'll leetly boy an' de hol' mans an' de hol' whomans tol' of it. Den we 'll seet an' squeeze de fire, an' be scare

fer look behin' of us, fer see de shadder creep, creep on de floor an' jomp on de wall, fer fred it be de loup garou."

"What specie of predarious animil is these 'ere loose garooses, Antwine? Be they anythin' of the human nater of a or'nary wolf or a loosevee, or a woollyneeg, or what?"

"Ah, Solem, dey was dev' more as anyting," said the Canadian in an awestricken voice. "Dev', dev'. Some tam dey was mans jes lak anybodee, an den dey was be wolfs, oh, more wusser as wolfs. Dey ketch dead mans in graveyards an' heat it, dey ketch live mans, an' heat it. Oh, dey was awfuls. Ah b'lieve dey ant gat some more in Canada, naow, but in de hol' tam dey had it. One tam, mah gran'-gran'mudder, he 'll gat so hol' he 'll mek off hees min's hee 'll die, an' mah gran'fader he 'll was go fer pries' in de naght, an' long, long way t'rough de hwood, an' he drivin' long on hees traine, can' hear no nowse 'cep' de snow scroonch, scroonch under de runner an' de hoss feet of it. Wal, seh, mah gran'pere was drovin' long, ant tink for much, 'cep' for hurry fas'. He 'll was goin' on smooze road t'rough de hwood wen hees hoss was beegin fer go slow an' he 'll can' mek it go fas', all he 'll wheep it. De hoss jes' pull hard lak he 'll draw more as two ton load an' sweat so he 'll smoke lak stimboat an' melt de snow on de road wid de drop of de sweat.

“Bambye mah gran’pere look behin’ of it, an’, seh, he ’ll see great beeg, beeg black dawg, mebbly wolf, he do’ know if it ant prob’ly, wid hees fore-foots on de hin’ en’ of traine, an’ he pull back more harder as de dev’.

“Mah gran’pere was mad, an’ scare more as he ’ll was mad, an’ he stroke dat ting wid hees whip, an’ dat ting jomp raght on de traine an’ put hees before feet on mah gran’pere shoulder of it, so heavy, he mos’ squeeze him. Mah gran’pere feel of hees knife fer cut at it, cause ef you drew bleed of de loup garou he ’ll turn mans raght off an’ go away.

“But he can’ fin’ hees knife, an’ he ’ll ant know what he ’ll do. De hoss was scare an’ run lak hol’ hurricanes, ’cause de loup garou gat hees behin’ foots off de graound an’ can’ pull back some more.

“Mah gran’pere feel dat hell ting’s hot bress froze hees neck, an’ hees hairs bresh hees face lak needle, an’ he ’ll shut off hees heye, so he can’ see dat awfuls yallar heye clost hees hown, an’ he give up for tink he dead, jes’ as de hoss run in de pries’ gate, an’ he holler an’ de pries’ run aout an’ say some word quick an’ laoud an’ de loup garou be mans raght off so quicker as you mek some wink an’ run off in de hwood.

“My gran’fader was so scare it was took more as mos’ half pant of de pries’ whiskey-en-esprit to brought it to.”

"I snum," said Joseph, going to the stove hearth to light his pipe, "seem 's 'ough I 'in most willin' tu be skeered by one o' the creeturs a leetle mite."

Giving no heed to the interruption, Antoine went on in the same awed voice: "An', seh, dey was mans leeve neighbor of mah gran'fader, was carry mark of wheep on hees face of it, for good many day."

"Did it put an end tu his uselessness, so tu speak?" asked Solon.

"Which o' them stories is treue, Ann Twine, an' which is a lie?"

Antoine's scared face gave evidence of his implicit faith in the story of the loup garou, but he did not hesitate to testify to the equal truth of the other tale, though it was but just improvised in his fertile brain.

"Bose of it, Onc' Lasha, sem always Ah 'll tol' you."

"Wal, wal, mebbly so, but wolf huntin' is pooty strainin' work, an' I guess we'd all better be a-gittin' tu bed."

And so desertion and darkness presently pervaded the shop, while the guests went plodding homeward over the snowy fields.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SHOEMAKER'S GHOST.

SOLON BRIGGS heaved a contented sigh when he had established himself in his favorite seat, with his back against the wall and his left knee nursed in his locked hands.

“What was ’t you was a-goin’ to tell t’ other night, Uncle Lisher, when we was discoursin’ consarnin’ speerits an’ apperagotions an’ Antwine come a-protrudin’ in his Canady stories?”

“Lemme see,” said Uncle Lisha, stimulating his brain with the point of an awl. “Oh, yes, I’ve got a holt on ’t.”

There was an expectant lull in the conversation, while Uncle Lisha meditatively splashed a tap in the little tub beside him. At last he said:—

“I sca’ce ever wet a piece o’ luther in that aire tub ’thaout thinkin’ o’ ol’ Uncle Ebenezer Hill, Jozeff’s uncle, ’at it useter belong tu. He was a shoemaker, an’ a turrible hones’ man, as shoemakers mos’ gen’ally is, Ann Twine.”

“Sometam dey was be,” Antoine laconically commented.

“Most allers, an’ he wa’n’t no exception tu the

rule. When he died an' his things was sol' off tu vandue, I bid off his kit an' this 'ere tub 'mongst 'em, an' it most allers makes me think o' Uncle Eben." He let the tap soak while he scraped out the heel of his pipe with a crooked awl, and filled it with a fresh charge of tobacco, with a deliberation painful to his audience.

"Wal, there was a man 'at undertook to cheat him arter he was dead. You see, the way on 't was, Uncle Ebenezer had got tu be tol'able well off when he died, and when his 'state come tu be settled, Bijer Johns begun to s'arch raound tu see 'f he could n't bring some claim ag'in' Uncle Ebenezer fer hides 'at he 'd sol' him.

"Wal, when the commissioners sot, he kerried it in 's prompt 's a major, an' the commissioners said they guessed they 'd hafter 'low it. When he come hum, his womern wanted tu know where he 'd ben an' what arter, an' he hed to tell her. 'Why,' s' she, 'I did n't s'pose Eben owed you nothin'.' But he said women did n't remember nothin' an' did n't allers know all 'baout ev'y-thing, though they consaited they did; an' he went off tu feed his hawg, a-shooin' the hens off'm the swill berril, an' a-dippin' aout the swill an' a-puttin' on the kiver kinder keerless, bein' 'at he wa'n't altogether easy in his mind.

"Bimeby, it come dinner time, an' he soldaown an' eat his dinner 'thaout no gret of a appetite t'

eat, an' then he went an' lay daown on the settee clus tu the open winder, but he could n't git a nap on 'caount o' them hides that wa'n't never raal ones, a-risin' up continual afore his eyes when they were shet er open.

"Bimeby he heard a n'ise, julluk sloshin' luther in a tub, kerslosh, kerslosh, kerslosh, an' then whack, whack, whack, julluk hammerin' a tap on a lapstun.

"'Hopy Ann,' says he tu his wife, a-liftin' up his head an' harkin' julluk a hawg in a cornfiel', 'what's that aire n'ise?' 'I don't hear nothin',' says she, a-stoppin' clatterin' the dishes an' lis'-nin', 'what is 't?'

"'It's a shoemaker tu work,' says he, 'an' there it comes ag'in.' An' up he got, scairt 's a strange cat. 'Hopy Ann,' says he, 'hev you ever hearn tell o' speerits walkin' in broad daylight?'

"'Bijer, are you clean aouten your head?' says she.

"'No, I hain't. But if ever I heard Uncle Eben Hill a-sozzlin' a tap an' hammerin' on 't, I hear it naow.'"

"Haow can he do dat, Onc' Lasha? Dat hol' shoemaket don't keep fer do beesiness w'en hee'll be dead, ant it?" interrupted Antoine.

"Wal," the old man continued, "he put on his hat an' kwut an' off he went up tu Uncle Eben's haouse where the commissioners hed n't goddone

a-settin', an' tol' 'em 'at he 'd made a mistake, which he 'd faound aout the 'state did n't owe him nothin' an' his 'caount must be hove aout, which the commissioners did heave aout, an' he went home turribly relieved in his feelin's.

“He sot tu duin' up some o' his chores 'fore supper, an' the fust thing he done was tu feed his hawg, an' as he got nigh the swill berril he heard that same kerslosh, kerslosh, whack, whack, ag'in, on'y not so laoud as afore, an' all kinder muffled, as ef it come aouten the airth onde'neath, an' he groaned aout laoud, ‘Ebenezer Hill, can't you lemme 'lone when I ben an' ondone what I done?’ An' he was so scairt he could n't sca'eely take the kiver off'm the swill berril, an' jest as soon as he did, kerslash, kerslash, kerwhack, whack, come the same ol' n'ise laouder 'n ever, an' right under his nose. An' what ye s'pose it was?”

Uncle Lisha swept a slow, inquiring glance around his audience. Only Antoine ventured an answer.

“Ah do' know 'f he ant prob'ly dat hol' shoe-maket come back for get col' off in de barril swill, hein?”

The old man glowered upon him a moment between his bushy eyebrows and the upper rim of his spectacles before he said:—

“It wa'n't nobody ner nothin' but a hen 'at 'had tumbled int' the berril, an' th' not bein' swill

'nough in 't tu draound her, she kept a-sloshin' an' a-floppin' the hull endurin' time.

"Bijer h'isted her aout an' hove her away so spiteful 'at he nigh abaout killed her, an' went a-mumpin' raound feelin' wus 'n he did when he thought Uncle Eben's ghost was a-hauntin' on him.

"He 'd withdrewed his 'caount an' the' wa'n't no help for 't naow. 'Seben dollars,' says he, 'an' fifty cents in money, 'at I might jest 's well had 's not, gone to thunder. I wisht that dumbd ol' hen had died 'fore ever she tumbled int' that swill berril, con-sarn her.' An' that 's haow thankful he was tu hev her savin' him f'm committin' a sin."

"He had certingly ortu ha' ben thankful that it was a mortal hen stid o' the apperagotion of a defuncted man 'at come tu save him from committin' a grievous crime," Solon Briggs commented as he dropped his right leg from across the left and with both hands lifted the left to the uppermost place.

"Dat mek me tink rembler," said Antoine, who had for some time been impatiently waiting an opportunity to speak, "'baout one man Canada —"

"One man Canady," cried Uncle Lisha. "I wish 't the' hed n't never ben but one man in Canady, an' he 'd ha' stayed there."

"Oh, Onc' Lasha," said Antoine, in a grieved

voice, "s'pose dat was me, haow lonesick you 'll was be some tam an' what troublesome Ah 'll was gat for ta' care all dat beeg country all of mah-se'f."

"Wal, wal, go ahead an' tell yer story, Ann Twine," said Uncle Lisha. "It 'll be a lie, but you 'll have tu tell it."

"It was 'baout a man dat was gat save hees laf by one hol' hen. Yas, sah, prob'ly two of it, one for be keel, tudder for be hang up for keel de man. 'F you 'll ant b'lieved it Ah can tol' you hees nam, bose of it, but 'f you 'll ant goin' b'lieved it Ah 'll ant goin' tol' you."

"I guess we c'n stan' it. Go ahead."

"Wal, seh, boy," — Antoine rapped the ashes from his pipe and laid it upon the stove, — "dar was one hol' man Canada nem Pierre Gautier, Ah guess so, an' he 'll gat more as honderd nacre lan' an' he pooty good up. An' he leeve all 'lone wid hees waf. Wal, seh, one tam he 'll go on de hwood market to La Prairie an' sol' up hees wheat an' tree, four, prob'ly six fat hol' peeg, an' he 'll brought home lots o' money fer it, prob'ly more as mos' two honderd dollar.

"Wal, seh, dar was fellar, nem of Gabriel Sa' Michel, was verree bad, do-not'ing fellar was too be on de market an' see hol' man Gautier gat all dat money, an' he 'll mek off hees min' he 'll goin' gat dat heese'f 'f he 'll had to keel Bon Homme Gautier."

“ Good airth an’ seas, Ann Twine, you jest said his name was Peair, an’ naow you ’re a-callin’ on him Burnham.”

“ Oh, dat ant be hees nem of it, more as Onc’ was you nem. Dat mean jes’ de sem lak Onc’, honly it mean good man; dey too polite fer call it you, hein?”

“ Wal, wal, go on wi’ yer Gaushy, er yer Burnham, er yer Gauby Clamshell,” cried the old cobbler, prodding the air with his awl in Antoine’s direction.

“ Wal, seh, dat hugly-ant-fit-for-be-decent Gabriel, he ’ll went dat naght for robber Bon Homme Gautier, stinkin’ long in de darks jes’ lak skonk goin’ for robber some negg on a hen rouse.”

“ Sneakin’ long, you mean tu say, Ann Twine; skunks don’t go stinkin’ ’long on sech business.”

“ Sneakin’ den, ef dat was please you more better, but Ah b’lieve Ah ’ll was tol’ dis storee, me. Wal, le’ me see where Ah ’ll was be.

“ Gabriel was goin’ long caffly all stoop daown close up bah hol’ Pierre hees haouse, an’, seh, fus’ ting he know it he walk almos’ top of a skonk. An’, seh, zhweetz, dat leetly causs preffume heem raght on bose hees heye of it, an’ mek it so bline he was mos’ can’ see for swear, an’ hurt heem so fer crazy heem.

“ He ’ll can’ tink fer robber, he ’ll can’ see fer robber, all he tink was fer fan’ brook fer wash off

hees heye, an' den go home. An' den he ga stinkin', Ah bet you head, Onc' Lasha."

"Proberbly."

"An' he 'll tink le Bon Dieu was sen' dat skonk, fer kept him from robber poor hol' Bon Homme Gautier, an' dat was de true. An' dat was de way a skonk keep one man from be keel an' one man from be hang up." Antoine waited for applause in a blank silence, wherein his audience waited for the conclusion of his story.

"Why, Ann Twine," Uncle Lisha said at last, "ef that 's the hull on 't, I don't see 's there was no hen hed nothin' tu du with 't."

"Oh, bah gosh!" cried Antoine in unwonted confusion, clutching his head with both hands. "You 'll mek me so bodder wid tol' me haow Ah 'll tol' it, Ah 'll gat two story all twis' up. Ah b'lieve Ah 'll tol' wrong story."

"I hain't no doubt you 've tol' a wrong story, Ann Twine; you 're allers a-tellin' wrong stories."

"Antwine 's julluk a haoun' pup," said Sam, "'at goes off on the fust scent he comes tu 'at crosses the track he 's on."

"Ho, Sam," cried Antoine, turning towards him, "Ah 'll glad for be heard you spoke. You 'll ant say not'ing but smoke all the evelin.' Ah 'll be 'fred you loss you vowse."

"I do' know as that was the way on 't," Joseph Hill said as he came to the stove to light his pipe

with a splinter, "but mebbly the skunk eat the hen 'fore Antwine could git to 't."

"An' Zhozeff can spoke," cried Antoine in feigned surprise, "Ah 'll ant tink he was mek off hees min' so quick."

"Wal, go on, Ann Twine. You promised us a story wi' a hen in 't, and a hen we 've got tu hev. Naow patch up your lie an' go ahead."

"Ah tol' you 'f you 'll ant trouble me all up an' mek me fregit for rembler de story Ah 'll was beegin," said the Canadian when the laughter of his companions subsided; and as they promised no further interruption, he began:—

"Wal, seh, dat Gabriel S' Michel, he 'll goin' 'long jes' sem Ah 'll say, honly he 'll ant walk on top of skonk. He was very fon' of cheekin hesef. An' gret many tam de folkes loss dey hen an' lay it to skonk an' wezil an' chat sauvage, w'en dey 'll ant to blem.

"Dis tam he feel inside of hesef, he was be dreffle hongry, an' he tink haow good was tase one of hol' Pierre fat chickens, w'en he 'll gat finish hees job of robber de money.

"He 'll tink it was bes' way for gat hees chicken fus, so he be all ready for go wen he do dat job. So he crep' in de hen rouse an' beegin felt raoun' in de darks, and de firs' hen he touch hol' of it was de beeg hol' rouster.

"He be hurry, so he pull de hol' rouster off de

rouse, an' 'fore he can stop off hees win' dat hol' rouser holler lak ev'reeting, '*keraaw, keraaw! keraaw, keraaw-uk*, wen Gabriel shut hees neck.

"De nowse wakin' up de hol' hwomans of her sleep an' he'll punch hol' mans of hees rib an' holler, 'Woke up. Skonk on de hen rouse.' An' hol' mans jomp off de bed an' gat hees gaun an' shove de winder an' look on de darks.

"It was be darks, but no so very darks, for he can see mans creep it off de hen-rouse, an' hol' Pierre he'll shot off hees gaun over hees head of it, an' Gabriel so scare he t'row de rouser an' run more as t'ree mile, prob'ly two, 'fore he'll stop for gat hees breeze, an' den he give up all hees plan for robber.

"Den he very glad for tink he'll ant do so weeked an' evree year dat sem day, he take de pries' beeg fat cheekin, so you see dat hol' rouser he'll do gret many good. He'll save hol' Pierre from be keel, he'll save Gabriel from be hang up, prob'ly. An' he'll mek de pries' more fatter as he was."

"Why, Ann Twine," cried Uncle Lisha, while the story-teller looked from one to another in expectation of approval, "your hen's turned aout tu be a ruster arter all. Haow be you goin' tu fix that up?"

"Oh, Onc' Lasha," cried Antoine, as a triumphant grin swept the shadow of perplexity from

his face, "haow you s'pose dat Gabriel was goin' tol what he touch hol' of in de darks. Ah'll ant to blem 'f he'll touch hol' of rouser wen he'll meant for git hen, ant it?"

"Wal, Ann Twine, you got aout on't pooty well," said the old man, laying aside his tools and the boot he was at work upon, "an' naow it's gittin' toward nine o'clock, an' I move we close the meetin' afore the critter thinks up another lie tu tell er abaout another man in Canady."

CHAPTER XII.

A MORNING OF SONG.

THE low, dark, gray sky, that had seemed to threaten a bodily smothering descent upon the earth, now began to scatter down a thickening shower of flakes, which the rising wind drove far aslant, dappling with flecks of down, then padding with white cushions, the windward sides of trees, fences, and buildings.

A great flock of snow buntings reveling in the storm swept along in the driven slant, like an accession of bulkier flakes, and settled in a long drift among the bent weeds, as heedless of the storm as its own wind-tossed flakes.

The further hills were quite hidden by the nearer woods, and isolated trees and dwellings were vaguely revealed through the drifting veil; and the snow, beating with a soft patter against the shop window, blurred it to deeper dullness with clinging flakes and the slow trickle of their melting.

No one but a shoemaker could work, and the rest of the world could only go a-visiting. Uncle Lisha futilely wiped the inside of his dull pane

and stared forth, but there was revealed to him only the distorted image of a woodpecker clinging to the leeward side of the nearest tree. Sam came in to smoke a second pipe, as did his father, in violation of his ordinary custom of sitting with women folks, whose unaggressiveness was a pleasing revelation after the experience of his later years.

But Uncle Lisha was not disappointed in his expectations; the stamping of feet on the doorstep announced visitors, and Solon, Joseph, Pelatiah, Antoine, and his father drifted in, in a snow-laden file, as if they had come down with the storm and were a noisier adjunct of it; and each scattered from him his burden of snow in a circle of melting moisture.

"Dis was ma fader, Onc' Lasha Pegg," said Antoine, leading his desiccated parent to the shoe bench. "He 'll gat great many hol', Onc' Lasha, he 'll gat some hol'. Ah 'll mek you intro-duce."

Uncle Lisha stared almost savagely at the old man, who bowed profusely and said: "Comme est ça va, M'sieu Pegg?"

"Hear the ol' critter callin' me a shoe peg," Uncle Lisha growled in an undertone, and roared in a voice so startling that the old Canadian recoiled before it:—

"Commadgy vaw. Good airth an' seas. Ef it's talkin' French yer arter, I'm jest the man.

Polly voo Francy. Sacree. Mushdaw. There ! He 's a sassy critter, a-callin' on me a shoe peg in my own shop."

"Oh, no-no-no, bien no, Onc' Lasha," Antoine protested. "He 'll ant call you not'ing, honly M'sieu Pegg ; dat was Mister Pegg, dat was all."

"Oh, I wanter know," Uncle Lisha ejaculated in some confusion. "Wal, that comes o' speakin' in unknown tongues. I c'n talk French consid'able, but I can't onderstan' it noways clear when other folks talks it. Seddaown by the stove, Ann Twinc's father, an' make yourself tu hum."

The old Canadian stared at his host in bewilderment till Uncle Lisha repeated the invitation in what he considered more intelligible phrase, and with a roar that he was sure must make it understood : —

"Sittay daown, smokey you peep," which being accompanied by a wave of the hand and a pantomimic sucking of the thumb, and interpreted by Antoine, induced the old man to take a seat behind the stove and fill his black pipe with rank, home-grown tobacco.

"An' naow what 's the news," Uncle Lisha demanded, as he laid a tap on the sole of a boot, fastened it with three pegs and trimmed the edge with his knife. "The' must be some, the hul caboodle on ye turnin' aout in sech a snowstorm."

"Wal," said Solon, not to be forestalled but

with seemly hesitation, "the' is what you might call eenamost discredibile news."

Uncle Lisha held his hammer suspended while he cast an inquiring glance at Solon.

"The' 's a feller," Solon continued, "hes come up to the village an' instigated hissself as a marchant in the Billins's saddler shop, an' he 's jest cuttin' in on Clapham like all smutteration, an' is jest a-gittin' his hul onmitigated trade."

"You don't say," said Uncle Lisha, driving home a peg and fumbling abstractly for another. "An' who is the critter?"

"Feller f'm V'gennes, name o' Bascom, an' he 's jest a-givin' away goods."

"Humph. Won't git turrible rich at that, I don't cal'late. Jest a-baitin' folks. Wal, wal, tew stores tu the village, an' I remember when the' wa'n't none."

"Ah 'll tol' you, Onc' Lasha, it was be jes' sem one man Canada, come to St. Ursule settin' up store an' sol' so cheap, evreebody crazy for bought it, an' dat man, he 'll borry, borry fave, ten, feefty, honded dollar ev'reebody, den fust dey'll know, whoop, he 'll bus' up, an' gone where someb'dy ant know."

"I d' know, but mebbly he hain't sellin' not tu say cheaper 'n Clapham, for they du say his paounds is almighty light an' his yards pleggid short, but I d' know," remarked Joseph.

"He 's a-sellin' boots a half dollar cheaper 'n what Clapham is," Pelatiah ventured to offer.

"Boots," Uncle Lisha growled in deep-toned contempt; "if he gin 'em away folks 'ould git cheated. Boots! 'Tannin' begretched an' makin' bewitched!' Le' 's hear suthin' interestin'. Someb'dy tell a story er sing a song. Ann Twine, can't yer father give us a French song?"

"Dat was de honly kan he 'll gat. He 'll ant learn for sung Angleesh lak Ah 'll was."

"It 's hopesin he won't," said Sam.

"Tune him up, Ann Twine," cried Uncle Lisha; and Antoine with a few words in French persuaded his father to sing in a nasally sonorous voice and with a feeling that was better understood than the words: —

"A la claire fontaine
M'en allant promener,
J'ai trouvé l'eau si belle
Que je m'y suie baigné.
Il y a longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oublierai."¹

Then without much persuasion, the old man sang "Roulant ma Boule."

¹ "Down to the crystal streamlet
I strayed at close of day,
Into its limpid waters
I plunged without delay.
I 've loved thee long and dearly,
I 'll love thee, sweet, for aye."

— From *Songs of Old Canada* translated by William McLennan.

“ Rouli, roulant, ma boule roulant,
En roulant ma boule roulant,
En roulant ma boule.”

“ I like that aire abaout rollin’ the bull almighty well,” Uncle Lisha commented when the songs were ended, “ but that aire Jimmy Jenny trouble you, I can’t make much on.”

“ Dat ant what it said, Onc’ Lasha. It was ‘ Jamais je ne t’oublierai,’ sem he ’ll said, ‘ Ah ’ll ant never goin’ fregit.’ But Ah ’ll goin’ sing you, so you on’s tan,” and he struck up more tune-fully than intelligibly, “ The girl I left behind me.”

“ De bee growl an’ weesh for save hees store,
De dove he shall turn over
An’ fall in de water, mek it roar,
If Ah ’ll fregit for love her.
If ev’ree chance Ah ’ll gat dat way,
An’ she ant gat for sign me,
Ah ’ll reckon up mah min’ for stay,
To de gal Ah love behine me.”

“ Lord o’ massy, yes, if a feller only knows the song he c’n onderstan’ it jest as easy as rollin’ off a lawg. Now then, Solon, give us ‘ Brave Wolf.’ ”

The swelling drone of Huldah’s spinning wheel had ceased, and the shop door was softly set ajar that the occupants of the kitchen might share the musical treat.

“ That aire French singin’ is turrible satisfyin’,”

Aunt Jerusha whispered, as she sat with her ear bent to the crack of the door and a pinch of snuff halfway to her nose, "considerin' you can't make aout a word on 't."

Then Solon, after much preparatory clearing of his throat, struck up his doleful song in a high-pitched voice.

"Cheer up your hearts, young men;
Le-at noth-ing fright yeou,
Be o-of a galliant mind,
Le-at that delight yeou."

When the hero of Quebec at last "died with pleasure" in the arms of his "Eddy Konk," Joseph Hill lifted up his voice in commemoration of another humbler and fairer victim of the great destroyer:—

"It was all by the banks of a beauchiful river,
As I walked aout in the sweet month of June.
A pretty fair maid I chanced tu diskiver,
As calmly she strayed by the light of the moon.
Nya — sing derry daown derry,
Nya — derry daown day."

"An' naow it's come your turn, Samwill." And Sam, after such persuasion as a bashful singer needs, sang of his beloved woods:—

"In the spring, there comes the fishin'
'Mongst the summer's posies gay,
Comes bee-huntin', yit I'm wishin'
That the seasons won't delay
Till I hear my haoun' a-hootin' an' a-tootin',
An' hear my gun a-shootin',
When the fox goes streakin' by.

“Oh, it’s bright in the mornin’ airly,
 Of a gay October day,
 ’At I delight mos’ dearly,
 Tu the woods tu take my way;
 Tu hear my haoun’ a-hootin’ an’ a-tootin’,
 An’ hear my gun a-shootin’,
 When the fox goes rus’lin’ by.

“Ev’ry painted tree ’s a-bringin’
 Back the posy beds o’ June,
 Ef I miss the birds a-singin’,
 I shall hear a sweeter tune.
 When I hear my haoun’ a-hootin’ an’ a-tootin’,
 An’ hear my gun a-shootin’,
 When the fox goes rus’lin’ by.

“When the airth is kivered white
 An’ the trees is naked gray,
 O, then ’t is my delight
 Tu the woods tu take my way,
 Tu hear my haoun’ a-hootin’ an’ a-tootin’,
 An’ hear my gun a-shootin’,
 When the fox goes streakin’ by.”

Then Uncle Lisha roared a song commemora-
 ting the gallant exploits of

“Tew lofty ships that from ol’ England sailed,
 One was the Prince o’ Luther, one was the Prince o’ Lee,
 Crewsin’ raoun’ on the coast of Barboree.”

If he ran amuck among the titles of English
 princes, the bold Briton, in quest of pirates, could
 not have shouted his orders louder than the Yan-
 kee cobbler sang:—

“‘Go aloft,’ cried aour Cap’n, ‘go aloft,’ shaouted he,
 ‘Look ahead, look astarn, look a-weather, look a-lee,’
 Crewsin’ raoun’ on the coast o’ Barboree;”

nor the corsairs have answered more boldly the hail,

“ ‘We aire no men o’ war, no privateers,’ says they,
‘But we aire some jolly pierutts a-seekin’ arter prey,
Crewsin’ raoun’ on the coast o’ Barboree,”

nor could the victorious British sea dogs have announced with greater zest the just retribution that overtook the pirates.

“For quatter, for quatter, so laoudly they did cry,
But the quatter that we give, we sunk ’em in the sea,
Crewsin’ raoun’ on the coast o’ Barboree.”

The stove pipe rang with a responsive vibration, and the cracked window panes rattled an accompaniment to the loudest notes, while a rat that had set himself to the task of gnawing through the mopboard, was awed into a long cessation of his labors.

“Lisher c’n sing jes’ as pooty ’s ever he could,” whispered Aunt Jerusha admiringly.

“I swan,” said Uncle Lisha, “Timerthy has sneaked off wi’out singin’. An’ naow, Peltier, you come in like what the shoemaker hove at his wife, but you’ve got to be heard from, jest the same. Tune up suthin’ lively, naow.”

Pelatah lingered diffidently on the verge of song, feeling his way here and there with an unsatisfactory pitch till at last he launched forth with the recital of experiences somewhat similar to his own:—

“ 'Tis of a poor young man,
Distraghted quite by love,
His storee I 'll relate,
Your tears all fer to move.

Conven-iunt a damsel lived,
No rose it could compare
A-with the damask of her cheek,
The color of her hair.”

So Pelatiah continued his doleful strain till the heart-broken hero went to sea to drown himself and his sorrow.

“ That aire’s a turrible lunsome kinder song, Peltier, an’ I ’m glad the’ hain’t no more on ’t. Good airth an’ seas, the’ hain’t no sense in a feller givin’ up that way.”

“ No,” said Sam, “ he ’d a tarnal sight better go aout an’ kill a wolf, er a fox, er suthin’.”

“ Onc’ Lasha, Ah ’ll wan’ gat you medjy ma fader his foot of it for mek it some boot. He ’ll gat hees botte sauvage all wear hoff so hees foots wet all the tam.”

“ All right, fetch him over here,” said Uncle Lisha, picking up a splinter of pine and splitting it to the desired size. “ Gittin’ on him ready tu go tu Colchester P’int? Wal, I ’d keep him here a spell yit. Folks never come back f’m the P’int no more ’n they du f’m any other hereafter. Why, they du say ’at you c’n hear th’ bones an’ skins a-rattlin’ ’fore you git within a mile o’ the P’int, an’ sech a pollyvoooin’! ”

“Oh, Onc’ Lasha, what you talk so? Frenchmans dead when he gat ready, some tam ’fore, jes sem somebody. Wen le Bon Dieu call it, he flew up an’ le Bon Dieu put it in veree high roos’.”

“Shets it in a coop, more like, Ann Twine. But trot aout yer father over here. Pull off yer boot, Ann Twine’s father. Pulley hoff you butt.” Uncle Lisha was not surprised that his meaning was comprehended by his customer, who cried, “Oui, oui,” very rapidly, and at once grappled with his right boot and presently disclosed a very dirty stocking.

“Naow set your heel ag’in’ the side o’ the haouse. Settey up you heely. No fersten? He’s so ol’ he’s forgot his own langwidge.’ ’

With Antoine’s help, the old man was backed up to the wall with his heel against the mop-board and Uncle Lisha stooped over his foot with a sharp-pointed jack-knife poised threateningly above his toes which were instinctively curved.

“Quit a-wigglin’ yer dumbd ol’ toes. I hain’t a-goin’ tu jab ’em. No wiggly paw de toe. There, I thought I could make you ondestan’,” and he succeeded in driving his knife in the floor at the end of old Pierre’s big toe. He transferred the measurement to the pine stick and marked it by a notch as he did several circumferences obtained with a string, and pronounced the prelimi-

nary labor accomplished, and the old Canadian drew on his boot with an air of great relief.

The clatter of dinner-getting was a signal for the departure of the visitors, who went forth to find the storm spent and the landscape smothered to silence in universal whiteness, and to make their way homeward by unmarked highways and by-paths.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIRST FOX.

SAM moving about cautiously in his stockings was attempting the impossible feat of building a fire in the stove without making a noise, for it was early and he hoped that he might not disturb any of the family.

The wood tumbled about in the box as if endowed with perverse life. The griddles would slip and clatter and the doors bang as if they were made for no other purpose. Uncle Lisha being a light sleeper was aroused and came forth to learn the cause of the unseasonable disturbance, with his waistcoat in one hand and buttoning his suspenders fumblingly with the other.

“What on airth is the motter, Samwill? Baby hain’t got the croup er nuthin’, has he?” he whispered anxiously.

“No,” was answered in a hollow whisper; “goin’ huntin’. Thought I’d hev me a baked ’tater and cup o’ tea tu start on, ’f I c’d git ’em ’thaout wakin’ the hull neighborhood, but this consarned stove’s ben dancin’ a jig sence I fust touched it an’ the wood turnin’ summersets

But I've got the 'taters in. Sorry I waked ye, Uncle Lisher. Drive, you ol' fool, quit yer whinin' an' caperin'. We hain't goin' yit."

"I'd slep' a plenty," and Uncle Lisha drew a chair to the stove and toasted his feet comfortably on the hearth. "Where be you goin', Samwill?"

"Well," said Sam, carefully filling a powder-horn while Drive watched the operation with intense interest, whining and treading the floor with his front feet, "I'm a-goin' tu take Peltier a fox huntin'. I b'lieve 'f I c'n git him int'rested in 't an' hev him kill a fox er tew, it'll git him over mopin' and honin' himself to death arter that misible gal. The' hain't nothin' like huntin' tu take a feller's mind off'm trouble."

"Wal," said the old man in a draughty whisper that set the candle flaring, "I d' know but what it'll help some, but I shall reckon more on fishin'. But I tell ye, I b'lieve he's kinder taken a shine tu that aire Varney gal, 'at was here tu the apple cut, an' that's a-goin' tu cure him."

"'T won't 'mount tu shucks. Peltier hain't that kind o' chap tu shift his likes sudden. I don't b'lieve he'll ever keer a row o' pins for any other gal. The best 'at can be done for him is tu git him from dwellin' on his trouble, an' I don't know o' nothin' better 'n huntin'. The quiet of the woods an' the noises, which is nigh about the same thing, is mighty soothin', an' the smell o' dead

leaves an' the spreuce an' balsam is stren'thenin' tu the narves, an' when you git raly woke up with the hootin' o' the haound a-drawin' nigher an' you hear the fox a-rustlin' the dry leaves an' snappin' the dry twigs, it sets your heart afire an' burns aout all the foolishness an' trouble."

"Mebby," said the other, "but fishin' is turrible soothin'. I'd ruther chance it on fishin' an' that Varney gal. She 's a strornary nice gal."

Sam opened the oven door and tested his cookery with a pinch. "My 'taters is done. Set by an' ha' some, Uncle Lisher?"

But the old man chose to wait for a more elaborate meal, and Sam hastily swallowing his tea, potatoes, and cold meat, and assuming his equipments, was ready to depart just as Pelatiah appeared, and the two held forth in the growing whiteness of the winter dawn with the old hound, sobering down to the business of his life, ranging steadily before them.

There had been a hoar frost in the night, and every fence and tree was turned to misty silver and pearl, and the mountain arose before them against the paling azure like a great cloud of pearl, unstable, ethereal, as if the lightest breeze might waft it away. There was a haziness in the atmosphere giving it an apparent softness that seemed to belong to another season, and make one almost expect to hear the songs of birds coming

from the silver foliage and see the stir of insect life among the feathery herbage of the frost, grown in a night upon the snow.

But the few sounds that scarcely broke the silence were all of winter. The smothered chuckle of the ice-bound brook, the resonant crack of a frozen tree, the muffled crow of a housed cock, and the discordant cries and flicker of the gay plumage of a jay early faring abroad were the only signs of life astir save the hunters and their hounds.

Old Drive soon found the warm trail of a fox that had been mousing among the snow-covered aftermath, and he presently set the mountain-side and the hills to bandying melodious echoes that awoke all the valley from its slumbers.

A dozen house dogs burst into vociferous bay-ing at the distracting multitude of airy voices and as many cocks sent forth their ringing challenges, and one by one the farmhouse chimneys began to lift their slanted pillars of smoke against the pearl-gray hills and blue sky.

There began to be signs of choring, the creaking and slamming of barn doors, the lowing of cattle, and men calling them to partake of their brown loaves, the stacks. Then were heard the mellow notes of horns and conchs, presently followed by a cessation of the sounds of labor. These, after a time, began again, with the clear, woody ring of axe strokes, the muffled thud of flails, the shouts of

ox-teamsters and the drawling creak of their sleds.

The hunters gave heed to none of them. Only to the voice of the hound were their ears attentive as it tended toward the hills that buttressed the mountain-side, letting here an echo fall asleep, there awakening another to wild mimicry.

“Ef he hain’t got him up, he will in less’n five minutes,” said Sam after a moment of breathless listening to the hound’s eager baying. “You pull foot for the saouth end o’ Pa’tridge Hill. The’ ’s a big hemlock in the aidge of a leetle clearin’. Stan’ there. If he gits past ye goin’, he ’ll come back that way. Stick to ’t as long as the dawg stays on the hill. I’ll go to the north end.”

He struck off at a swinging gait, and Pelatiah in a divergent course made his way to the point indicated. He reached it much out of breath with climbing and excitement, his heart beating such a tumultuous accompaniment to the notes of the hound, drawing nearer and nearer, that he could scarcely hear their music.

He cocked his gun, and strove to settle his trembling nerves while he strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of the fox, for he could hear the hound crashing through the brush and whining and panting as he puzzled over a double of the trail. Then his heart stood still at a sudden flash of ruddy fur among the brush, his gun was at his

shoulder, his finger feeling the trigger, but with a qualm of disgust he saw a red squirrel scampering along a log.

The music of the hound swept past, and Pelatiah's heart sank with the sense of lost opportunity. But he remembered Sam's assurance that the fox would come back, and took hope again. He backed into a comfortable position against the hemlock and listened half dreamily to the pulsing diminuendo of the hound's bugle notes and to the minor voices of the woods. A party of inquisitive chickadees sounded their cheery call close about him, a nuthatch piped nasally as he crept in a downward spiral along the branching trunk above. A woodpecker industriously tapped a dead tree, the squirrel dropped a slow shower of cone chips, and a company of jays attuned their voices to unwonted softness as they discoursed together.

Yet he was continually aware of the hound's mellow notes overbearing all these sounds, though faint and far away, till suddenly there broke above them all the short, thin report of a rifle, and almost with the fading out of the brief echo the baying of the hound ceased.

"Wal," said Pelatiah, letting his hopes down to the earth with a sigh. "The fox 's dead, that's sartain, but I should n't ha' thought Sam would ha' cut in ahead on me an' shot him. That wa'n't the Ol' Ore Bed! 'T wa'n't laoud enough! It's

some skunk that 's sneaked in an' stole aour fox, an' by gol, he 'll haftu hump hissself ef I don't ketch him er run him in."

He pushed rapidly forward in the direction that he heard the shot. His course was lengthwise of the ledge, with so few obstacles that a half hour's walk brought him to the end of the fox's track, marked with a great blood-stained wallow in the snow. Leading straight away from it toward the little valley behind the hill went the tracks of a big pair of boots with a disproportionate stride.

"A short-laiged critter," Pelatiah remarked, as he settled himself upon the trail, "an' I guess my shanks' hosses 'll fetch him."

The trail presently led him to a narrow clearing and a little gray house that stood in forlorn nakedness of shade-trees and outhouses, close to an untraveled highway. The big boot tracks held straight across the poor little garden with its feeble array of bean poles bearing their withered garlands of rustling vines, passed the starved woodpile and its dull axe, to the neatly swept doorstep.

"Consarn his pictur'," and Pelatiah waxed hot with wrath as the trail grew warmer, "he's sneaked intu Widder Wigginses. But he need n't cal'late petticutts 'll save him. I 'll skin 'im if the 's a dozen women standin' raound. The blasted thief."

He stepped softly upon the plank doorstep, and was about to enter, when he heard the excited voice of a boy and stopped to listen. He also heard the sibilant rush of air from the nipple of a gun and the soft pop of a with-drawn patch mingling with disconnected words and knew that the speaker was cleaning a rifle.

“ Oh, ma,” cried a voice with a grunt that indicated the pushing down of a patch, “ I tell ye, it was fun. I popped him right plum through the head, an’, sir, I dropped him right in his tracks. An’ hain’t he a neat one ! An’ naow I’m goin’ to skin him an’ stretch him an’ take him daown to Clapham’s an’ sell him an’ git you some tea an’ sugar.”

“ It ’ll be turrible good tu hev some ag’in, ’specially when a body is feelin’ so peakéd,” said a feeble voice. “ An’ haow did you happen tu kill a fox, Billy ? That’s men’s game.”

“ Oh, I was up on the hill tryin’ tu git a pa’ttridge, an’ I heard a haoun’-dawg a-comin’ an’ I jes’ stood still as a post, an’ fust I knew it, I seen the fox come bobbin’ along an’ I up an’ let him hev, an’ daown he flopped, an’, sir, I couldn’t b’lieve ’t was treue, an’ when I r’aly got a holt on’t I got dizzy an’ all of a tremble, an’ the nex’ thing I thought on was the tea an’ sugar fer you. An’ then the haoun’-dawg come up and chawed him a spell, an’ then I slung him on my back an’ p’inted fer hum.”

All the fire of Pelatiah's wrath was quenched and he was about to retire as silently as he had come, when he was arrested by the voice of the woman pitched to a tone of earnest reproof.

"Oh, Billy, you hed n't ever ortu done that. You'd orter waited an' gi'n the hunters the fox. It's jest stealin'. Father allus said so. Oh, Billy, they'll be arter you, an' nob'dy knows what they won't du tu ye. Whose haoun'-dawg was it, Billy?"

"It was Sam Lovel's ol' Drive. It's the fust fox 'at ever I shot," Billy whimpered, "an' haow be I ever goin' tu git yer tea an' sugar?"

"It don't make no diffunce; you mus' take that aire fox right stret tu Samwill Lovel. You've got tu take it tu them it belongs tu. Mebby the Lord 'll pervide; but I d' know, it's long a-wait-in'. Hang up the gun an' start right stret off. Take the fox an' start right off like an' hones' man."

Pelatiah broke in unceremoniously upon poor Billy's mournful preparations for departure, his unannounced appearance startling alike the boy and his sick mother, who stared at him half frightened, half indignant, from her uncomfortable support of scant pillows.

"The' don't nob'dy want no fox, Mis' Wiggins," he burst out impetuously. "Samwill an' me don't want him, ner won't hev him, nuther. Bub c'n

take him right daown tu Clapham's an' git all he can fer him. Dollar an' a half, I should n't wonder. We won't have it, I tell ye. We would n't tech tu take the fust fox 'at a boy ever shot. We know how he feels, me an' Samwill."

Certainly not by experience did Pelatiah know ; but by sympathy, perhaps he did, to-day.

"Be ye much sick, Mis' Wiggins ? Bub hed better git Darktor Stun tu come up. I'll hev mother come over. Good-day."

He hurried to go, in as great confusion as that in which he left the widow and her son, who found not words but only grateful looks to thank him.

He stopped at the meagre woodpile and plied the dull axe with sturdy strokes till three or four armfuls of wood were ready for the stove, and then hurried away up the long eastern slope of the hill. He laughed at himself as he recalled his recent small adventure. "Poor leetle shaver, a-floppin' raoun in his dead father's boots an' me a-bilin' myself up to lick someb'dy. Gol !"

Then through the stillness of the woods the mellow cadence of the old hound's bugle notes stole upon his ears, and all his thoughts were turned to the day's purpose. Listening to get the direction, he became assured that the earnest, insistent baying was almost confined to a fixed point.

“By golly, he’s started another, an’ holed him, I guess. But I’ll hyper over and git the dawg.”

As he neared the place, the steep western side of the hill, he found that the hound was moving in small circles and felt renewed hope, and his heart gave a great choking bound as he caught a glimpse of the fox dodging among the rocks and brush of the steep hillside. So steep and slippery was the footing that Pelatiah was obliged to slip his arm around a sapling to hold his position, and so standing, he cocked his gun and waited, his heart rising and sinking as Drive’s notes approached and receded.

Suddenly, like a ruddy blossom that had burst from the wintry hillside, the fox appeared on the top of the rock and turned to look back at the dog. The sight was drawn against the arched side, the trigger was pulled, there was a kick of reassuring force, a responsive roar and a wreathing, slowly-lifting cloud of smoke that for one moment of sickening doubt Pelatiah tried to peer through, and then he was filled with unspeakable joy at sight of the fox lying beside the rock, gasping spasmodically, while his magnificent brush was moved with tremulous undulations. And then he knew how Billy Wiggins had felt. Not till he had laid hold of his prize did he find voice to halloo to Sam, but then he did it with such repeated vociferations that there was danger of alarming all the valley.

Sam soon appeared on the scene, imperturbable but congratulatory.

“ You done almighty well, Peltier, but where ’s your t’ other fox? I hearn a shot an’ the dawg come tu me.”

“ Wal,” said Pelatiah, hesitating a little, “ Widder Wigginses boy shot him an’ I hed n’t the heart tu take it away from him. An’ she ’s sick an’ they ’re poorer ’n snakes. No tea nor no nothin’.”

“ An’ ye done almighty well, Peltier,” Sam said, after attentive consideration of the case. “ Huldy an’ me ’ll go over there to-morrer an’ see tu ’em. An’ naow le’ ’s skin that aire fox. By the gret horn spoon, he ’s a buster! ”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DRAWING-BEE.

IF the medicine administered by Sam for Pelatiah's wounded heart did not cure that member, it eased its pain and was taken with a relish. Every propitious hunting morning found him afoot betimes with Sam and their trusty comrade, Drive, breasting the snow-drifted steep, ranging the wind-swept ridges, and guarding the likeliest runways, while their hearts beat fast or slow to the swelling and dying cadence of the hound's melodious voice.

Then at nightfall, when the valley lay in blue shadows, with stars of houselights beginning to twinkle from its depths, and the last touch of the departing sun painted the great mountain-top with pulsing, nacreous tints against the rising shadow of the world, while beneath crept up the devouring monochrome of pearly gray, they fared homeward, often proud with a burden of trophies, always content with intangible ones or the comfort of deferred hope.

Uncle Lisha watched the treatment doubtfully. "Huntin' may du it, but fishin' is soothin'er,

an' I cal'late more on 't ;" and he waited with impatience for the opening of the waters and the coming of his own opportunity to become a mediciner.

It seemed as if winter would never relinquish its sway even when the allotted period of its reign had expired. There were lapses, when the air came soft from the south, and the crows took heart of grace to return to the inhospitable land, and a solitary song sparrow to sing in the garden cherry-trees. Then the bitter winter wind came howling down from the north, and beat back the vernal tide, driving the crows in wind-tossed flight to the woods, and freezing out the sparrow's song, and making the sugar-makers idle but in anathe-matizing the untoward season.

At last there came a mild warmth into the atmosphere and up out of the earth, thawing the snow from beneath, till tawny hillocks and ridges cropped out. Warm showers poured down from clouds that parted to give glimpses of heavenly blue and drop squadrons of sunshine to charge across the fields, where changing sky and steadfast mountain swam inverted in the pools. The brooks were full to the brim of their snowy banks, and the rush of their yellow currents filled the air with a soft, changing murmur, like the song of the wind in pine woods. There was a busy hum of bees about the fresh sawdust and sappy logs of

the woodpile, and the idle buzz of flies warmed to life on the sunny side of buildings. Out of the maple woods still drifted the pungent smoke of the sugar camp and the fragrance of boiling sap.

Uncle Lisha opened the shop door to let in the pleasant outer warmth and sounds. He heard the sharp, imperative note of the first phebe-bird, and saw her swooping among the swarms of flies, and as he drove the pegs and trimmed the tap, he counted the days till he could go a-fishing.

So the spring drew slowly but surely on. Fields and highways became dry and pleasant to feet that were weary of snowy and icy paths. The snow that endured but in grimy drifts was not like snow, so coarse-grained was it, and besmirched with litter and the débris of ploughed fields.

The purple mist of swelling buds enfolded the woods; the yellow windrows of pussy-willows were piled along the brooks, where arose the crackling clatter of the first frogs, the shrill chime of the hylas, and the incessant trill of the toads.

The robins came, querulously yelping at first, then joyously celebrating their arrival; and the bluebird and his song floated down from the sky together. The voice of the brooks had fallen to a soberer cadence, that seemed to sing of fishing, and so, one morning, Uncle Lisha resolved to learn the condition of the water.

A good excuse was offered by the drawing bee

at Daniel Meeker's, to reach which Stony Brook must be crossed. He put away his tools and work, sloughed off his apron, and wormed himself into an old coat that happened to have a fish-line in one of the pockets and a worm-bag in another.

"I'm goin' over tu the drawin'," he proclaimed through a cranny in the door to the occupants of the kitchen.

He hastened out to poke a broken spade through a convenient hole to the back side of the wood-shed, whither he then betook himself. With some rapid and noiseless delving, he unearthed a handful of worms, bestowed them in his pocket, and, assuring himself that he had not been observed, set forth with the air of one to whom a drawing bee was an affair of the greatest importance in life.

As he went down the slope to Stony Brook his pace became slower and more cautious. In the first thicket he got out his jack-knife, studying saplings till he selected a young hardhack, which with vigorous slashes, reinforced with grunts, he cut down and trimmed and knotted his line upon, and put a worm upon the hook.

Crushing unheeded a pink and purple colony of squirrel-cups, he crept up under cover of a stump and dropped his hook into a pool whose current, flecked with floating and submerged bubbles, writhed and doubled under the downpour of a little waterfall.

The twisting current had hardly caught the worm, when the hardhack tip was drawn violently down, then more violently up, and a handsome trout was kicking and gasping on the dry leaves and fresh blossoms. The pool was swarming with trout, and so greedy that a score were contending at once for a worm the angler dropped to them from his coign of vantage, and the sudden flight of their brethren skyward seemed to work no abatement of their zest and courage, so that in a short time he was in possession of a dozen of them. Then their ardor cooled a little, and, counting up his catch, he said, with a sigh of contentment: —

“Wal, I guess that ’ll du fer a man ’at hain’t a-fishin’, on’y goin’ tu a drawin’ bee.”

Then he strung the lusty fellows on a birch twig, and held them before him, turning them slowly, while their shifting hues and the light of his happy countenance vied with each other.

“Sech implyment orter cure any love-sick foolishness, an’ I du b’lieve it ’ould du the business fer Peltier.”

He tethered his trout in a secret nook of the brook, took the line off the pole and put it in his pocket and resumed his way toward the bee, still carrying the hardhack sapling.

“It ’ll make a good ox-gad fer some on ’em,” he said, giving it a whistling flourish over the backs of an imaginary pair of oxen.

Out of a near thicket throbbed the muffled beat of a partridge's mating call, from an elm the blithe cackle of a high-hole, and from a meadow the prolonged whistle of a lark, — spring sounds that gladdened the old man's heart to unison with the quickened pulse of nature.

At last he came to the assembly, where were gathered a throng of oxen and their drivers. These, in shirt-sleeves or frocks of blue homespun, with long whips under their arms, were gathered in knots to gossip of town or neighborhood affairs. Lisha was greeted by many acquaintances, and chaffed by some for coming with a whip and no oxen.

"Aout-traveled yer oxen, didn't ye, Uncle Lisher?" John Dart asked.

"No, I come tu du the hollerin' an' whippin', an', in a gin'ral way, tu make the bee respectable. An' there comes Joel Bartlett's father-in-law, Uncle Nathan Matterson, tu help me."

This new-comer was a gaunt old man, clad in the plainest of Quaker attire. He always employed the same form of speech with dumb brutes as with mankind.

"Why don't thee gee off, Buck," he was saying to his off ox, in mild expostulation, and then to his near one, "Bright, thee knows thee orter gee, an' naow why don't thee?"

Pelatah came, driving his father's oxen, but,

before Uncle Lisha could have speech with him, the order was given by the carpenter who superintended the work to hitch on to the barn which was to be moved. With an immense outlay of shouting, the thirty yokes of oxen were got into two lines and each line attached to the huge wooden runners that had been placed under the sills of the barn. This stood, forlorn now, with the desolation of internal nakedness, and quite deserted except for some adventurous urchins who hoped to steal a perilous ride, till discovered by the ubiquitous carpenter and unceremoniously driven forth. The spectators, among whom were Gran'ther Hill and Uncle Lisha, sat on a pile of timber, commending and disapproving.

"The' hain't teams 'nough tu haul that aire barn, easy," said one.

"Ef the oxen was wuth a sous markee, they'd run away with 't," growled Gran'ther Hill, "but the tarnal critters hain't goo' fer nothin', all pompered on hay an' grass. When they use ter live on braowse, they hed siners an' bones intu 'em. Yis, sir, bones, an' you c'd see 'em stickin' aout. You c'd spit through 'em, but they c'd pull like a livin' airthquake. You'd orter seen us a buildin' the bridge tu Ti. Timbers s' long you'd hafter stop an' rest goin' the len'th on 'em. Three yoke o' them oxen 'ld snarl 'em right along. An' when you come tu eat 'em, you hain't no idea

what chawin' they 'd stan'. There was suthin' tu 'em, I tell ye."

The carpenter made a brief inspection of the lines and shouted, "Be ye all ready?"

There was a handling of whips and a spasm of preparation for the work in hand.

"Wal, then, all together. Go'long."

Then out burst a mighty, discordant shout and slashing whistle of whips and the oxen settled into their yokes with a stubborn, steadfast pull, and the gray barn groaned farewell to its ancient abiding place and began to move away. It was fairly started on its journey, when old Nathan Mattison raised an imperative cry of, "Whoa, whoa, whoa!" and every one thinking there must be serious trouble, there was a universal long drawn "Whoa," that brought all the tugging oxen and their unwieldy burden to a stand; each driver craned his neck past his fellows or over the backs of his oxen, to learn the cause of the halt.

They saw the simple old man, rushing to and fro among the teams, slashing the ground with his whip and shouting, "A maouse, a maouse." To the storm of indignation that arose about him, he calmly replied, "A maouse 's a turrible mischeevyous leetle animil!"

The procession was started again, and, uninterrupted by more mouse-hunting episodes, the barn

made steady progress to its new foundations, leaving its old place marked by dislodged corner stones, a square of grassless ground, fringed with dead weeds whose generations had flourished and withered there for scores of years; only these to tell the returning swallows and phebes where had been their accustomed shelter of eaves and rafters.

The oxen were unyoked from the lines and given rations of hay which they munched greedily with a clanking of yokes and clashing of horns, while they crowded and pushed for the furthest and choicest mouthfuls.

Then Daniel Meeker and his wife and two daughters brought out great pans of yellow gingerbread and twisted doughnuts and cheese and a great pail of cider with a tin dipper swimming in it and clanking invitations against the sides. Every one bore double handfuls of the bountiful refreshments to comfortable seats and regaled themselves while they discoursed out of the fullness of their mouths. A little of such speech Uncle Lisha got with Pelatiah as they sat on the unfinished end of the woodpile, still redolent of untamed woodsy odors.

"Ef you got anythin' tu du tu-morrer, stent yourself an' du it this arternoon," he whispered out of a shower of gingerbread crumbs, "fer I want ye tu go a-fishin' wi' me in the mornin'. Stuny Brook's thiek 's puddin' wi' traouts a-gap-in' fer us. Will ye go?"

Pelatiah elongated his neck thrice to assist the downward passage of a mouthful of doughnut before he could answer, "Yes," and then they planned their outing.

Then Daniel Meeker made proclamation: "Ef any one hes bruck his chains, he c'n leave 'em at Dan'l Ackley's blacksmith's shop an' I 'll foot the bill."

The company then began to disperse amid a clanking of yoke rings and the bawling of teamsters.

Uncle Lisha plodded his way homeward across the pleasant fields, and, happily unforestalled by any thieving mink, bore home his string of trout and exhibited them with modest exultation.

"Fer all this livin' worl'," cried Aunt Jerusha, contemplating him with a quiet smile; "so you sneaked off a-fishin', stiddy a-goin' tu the drawin'."

"I done both, but tu-morrer, I'm jest a-goin' a-fishin', me an' Pelatier."

CHAPTER XV.

GOING FISHING.

AT an early hour the two anglers were behind the woodshed, Pelatiah turning the moist soil, dotted with green tufts of young motherwort and catnip, while Uncle Lisha stooped before him, turning the clods with his fingers and picking up the lusty worms as they were disclosed.

“The’ ’s sati’faction in fishin’ from the fust start,” he said as he dropped a worm into the battered teapot between his feet. “More ’n there is in huntin’. You don’t see nothin’ afore you when you’re puttin’ paowder int’ your horn an’ shot int’ your bag. But when you grab holt of a worm’s head an’ feel him a-lettin’ go of the airth, slow an’ reluctin’, you c’n eenamost feel a traout snatchin’ at him. An’ there bein’ worms goes to show the’ must be fish, bein’ that they was made for one ’nother. There, Peltier, I b’lieve we’ve got ’nough,” and he arose, straightening his spine with the backs of both grimy hands which he then brushed on his trousers, and the two set forth.

A dappled sky, filtering soft streams of sunshine, and a constant waft of south wind, invited

them; the long whistle of meadow-larks called them, and a high-hole on a dry stub drummed a rapid, ringing roll to accelerate their steps.

Presently they came to a thicket that bordered the brook, where gray stumps of departed trees stood half disclosed among the misty ramage of saplings and the dark pyramids of young evergreens, and where yellow beds of adder-tongue minicked sunlight, while spears of bloodroot pierced their own green shields and the first moose flowers splashed the shadows with their white blossoms.

As they entered it a partridge uttered a note of alarm and went hurtling away out of a flurry of dead leaves, and a woodchuck smothered his own querulous whistle as he retreated into his newly opened hole.

Uncle Lisha, feeling in his pocket for his knife, slowly searched for a proper rod.

“An’ the’ ’s consid’able enj’ymnt gittin’ a pole,” he continued, as if his discourse had suffered no interruption. “You don’t wanter be tew fast, er you’ll be lierble tu run away f’m good un; an’ git desput an’ take up wi’ a mean un, jest as lots o’ folks du in this world, ‘goin’ through the woods an’ takin’ up wi’ a crooked stick,’ at last. Then ag’in, you don’t want tu be tew slow an’ pertic’lar er you won’t never git tu fishin’. An’ arter all, there will be disapp’intments, Peltier,” he went on, bending down a sapling and slash

ing it from the stump. "You pick you aout one 'at looks all right, but when you come to trim it, it's crookeder 'an a snarled waxed eend, erless it 's top-heavy, er suthin', an' that 's the way o' the world ag'in. But you don't want tu give up fer that, an' say the' hain't no decent gals, — fish-poles, I mean, — an' say you 'll be dumbled if you try tu go a-fishin', fer the' 's jest as good fish-poles stan'in' as ever was cut, an' the' 's lots o' fun waitin' fer you tu git your sheer."

"When you 've got a holt o' the best-lookin' one the' is an' it turns out tu be brittler'n dry popple, what's the use o' tryin' to pick aout another?" Pelatiah asked as he carelessly trimmed a young birch.

"It wa'n't nothin' but dry popple an' you misjudged," Uncle Lisha answered as he neatly trimmed the branches and knots from his pole, "an' you wanter try ag'in, not seddaown an' mump."

He put the finishing touches to his work, snapped his knife shut against his hip and began to tie on his line.

"I don' cal'late the' 's as much fun gittin' ready fer huntin' as the' is fishin'. You buy your gun er borry it an' you do' know what it's goin' t' du, mebby kick you like all possess' an' kill nothin'. If it's one you've hed, you know all abaout it, an' hain't no expectations one way ner t' other. An'

you don' make it er fin' it, o'ny feed it so much paowder an' tow an' shot. I don' cal'late these fellers 'at has 'em a j'inted pole, wi' a leetle brass windlass on 't, gits half the enj'ymment we du. They must feel allers afeer'd o' breakin' on 'em, er suthin', an' they must feel almighty mean to be a-foolin' fish wi' them feather contraptions. Fishes' feelin's orter be considered some. We give 'em the chance o' gittin' suthin' good. They offer 'em nothin' more 'n dry hus's. But le' 's git tu fishin'."

The trout were as plenty and as hungry as they had been the day before, and gave these simple anglers all the sport they desired, wherein, if no fine art of the craft was exercised, much good judgment and knowledge of the habits of the shy trout were displayed.

Making their slow way down the stream, they crept stealthily up to every promising place, taking here, a wary old trout from his log-roofed stronghold or root-netted hiding place, and there, three or four from beneath a circling raft of foam bells that slowly wheeled and undulated at the foot of a tiny waterfall, reinforced with new bubbles as others burst, and keeping ever the same.

They came to an alder-arched bit of water that looked promising, but there was no chance to make a cast. Uncle Lisha hunted the bank for a chip, which being found, he coiled his line upon it and set it afloat. It went tossing and whirling down

stream among the shadows and the sparkle of rapids, uncoiling the line as it went, till it was all out and the baited hook was drawn overboard, and with a wavering plunge went out of sight.

There was a sharp tug, responded to by a too vigorous strike, and a fine trout came flying out of the water with a long, upward curve that hung him on an alder bush six feet above the brook.

Uncle Lisha waded down stream to secure him, beginning to discourse again as he splashed cautiously along the slippery bottom.

“As I was sayin’, I cal’late fishin’ is better ’n huntin’ most any way you take it. You ’re more sartain o’ gittin’ suthin’ as a gin’l thing, an’ ef you don’t you don’t feel no wuss ner nigh so tired. An’ what you git, you git, an’ what you waound, goes off an’ gits well, stiddy a-lingerin’ an’ suff’-rin’ an’ dyin’ mis’able. Then ag’in” — he was reaching up for the dangling fish, rising on his toes, — “it’s soothin’er;” both feet slipped, and with a great splash he sat down, half damming the current that swirled and gurgled about his hips.

“Yes,” he reiterated stoutly, as Pelatiah helped him to arise and regain the bank, “it’s soothin’er, but I won’t say I like it quite so dumbd soothin’. But I don’t keer a darn, I’ve got the fish.”

His clothes were wrung out and they fared forward, the old man still enjoying the sport while his trousers slowly dried in the genial air.

The brook babbled its endless story to them. From distant meadows came the songs of meadow-larks, the cackle of flickers, and the long wail of a plover. On the soft breath of the south wind were wafted past them in wavering flight the first butterflies, purposeless of aught but mere enjoyment.

"It's soothin'er," he repeated, "on accaount o' huntin' bein' excitiner. You git more time tu set an' think abaout nothin' an' look araound an' listen an' git tu feelin' peaceable, when the luck hain't tew almighty bad. But that don't make a feller so grumpy an' rantankerous as onlucky huntin'. When I ben a-humpin' over ol' boots and shoes till I do' know myself by smell or feelin' f'm a side o' so'luther, the' hain't nothin' 'at fetches me tu myself ag'in like goin' a-fishin'. I'd livser git a mess 'an tu not, feelin' better carryin' hum a respectable string an' hevin' more pluck tu go ag'in' female opposition nex' time the fit takes me, but ef I don't git enough tu raise a smell in the pan, I've hed me my fishin'. I've seen the brook an' heard it a-talkin' tu itself an' mebbby to me, I do' know, an' like 'nough seen some odd capers o' birds er animils an' got the kinks aouten my j'int's, an' so don't caount I've lost the day. S-s-h-h. See that pleggid mink."

He pointed out the lithe, alert, dusky form poised on the verge of a brookside boulder, in-

tently scanning the eddying current beneath, and the two watched him make a noiseless, arrowy plunge, and emerge with his writhing prey and bear it into the net-barred fastnesses of the bank.

“An’ he’s a-hevin’ his leetle fishin’ tu, which I don’t begretch it tu him, seein’ he does it so slick an’ handy. An’ naow, Peltier, I guess we might as well call it we’ve got ’nough. We might git more, but we do’ wanter be hawgs. You’ve got a string o’ fish ’at ought tu make a man happy an’ contented an’ fergit lots o’ trouble, an’ I hope it does, better ’n all Hamner’s pizen, which it’s hopesin’ you’ve forsook. Naow, whenever you git daown-hearted, go a-fishin’. You’d a leetle druther hev it a good day, but go anyway if you can’t make the weather an’ you ’re feelin’s tarve.”

So they took their way homeward in the gathering twilight, with the vibrant purr of the toads ringing all about them, and now and then a startled bird scurrying out of the dead grass before them.

“See the pooty pooties, bubbly,” said Uncle Lisha, dangling his string of fish before the delighted eyes and reaching hands of Sam’s baby. “No, could n’t hev ’em naow, bubbly, but when he gits big an’ wears trousers he shell go ’long wi’ Uncle Lisher an’ ketch snags on ’em, an’ mammy ’ll cook ’em an’ tell us tu go ag’in.”

CHAPTER XVI.

A RAISING-BEE.

BECAUSE of the greater interdependence of the people, "bees" had been much more common in the days of Uncle Lisha's youth than in these of his old age, but he had not lost his fondness for attending them. So one May morning, when Sam and his father came into the shop and told him of a "raisin'" at Jonathan Young's, he needed no urging to drop his tools and toss aside a boot from which he had but half ripped the worn sole, slough his apron, don his coat and hat, and declare his readiness to accompany them.

"I can't du no gret, on'y help du the settin' raound, an' mebbly hol' the foot of a pos' er du the spry runnin' raoun'," he said as he plied his short legs to keep up with his long-limbed comrades, carrying his hat in his hand to fan his face at every swing of his arm.

There were tufts of blue violets in the mixed dun and green of the meadows, and, like stars in the evening sky, the first dandelions shone far apart in the greening pastures which the newly turned out sheep were overrunning, too eager for the fresh grass to heed the passing strangers.

A new-come bobolink sang before and above them, now atilt on a fence stake, now aflight on vibrant wings. Robins were flying to and fro, busy nest building, and a plover's wailing call drifted down on the breeze from a distant field. The haze on the woods was thickening with gray-green mist of opening buds, with here and there the yellow tower of a leafing poplar shining out of it.

Whatever subtle impression the changing season may have made on them, they made no sign but to say, "It's an airy spring and a fine growin' time;" and after a while came to where their neighbors were gathering about the recumbent bents of Jonathan's prospective barn, and the chips of hewing and chiseling that exhaled the fine fragrance of fresh-cut wood. The carpenter, as redolent of the same odor as if he were born of a tree, was bustling about with a square and scratch-awl, while the people lounged about, watching his movements with curiosity or gossiping of neighborhood or town affairs. Jonathan Young, nervously expectant, went from group to group, discoursing of the barn that was to be.

"Goin' to hev bay on the west side o' the barn floor an' a scaffil on the east, wi' a stable 'nunder it, high 'nough 'tween j'int's so 's 't a man o' my hayth won't knock his head off in 't;" and Jonathan was five feet four inches, in his stockings.

“Hain’t ye ’fraid o’ bein’ dizzy-headed when you git ’way up on that scaffil’?” John Dart inquired anxiously.

“Hes the pathmaster warned ye aout tu work on the rhud in your deestrick?” one inquired of a distant neighbor.

“No, ner won’t tech tu till arter plantin’.”

“Wal, aourn hes, the tarnal critter, an’ the rhuds hain’t no more settled ’n my rhud tax is,” the first speaker remarked, and then directed his remarks against the fathers of the town. “Ef the s’lec’men don’t spunk up an’ du suthin’ abaout the bridge tu the village, the taown ’ll hev a lawsuit on its han’s fust it knows. One o’ the bupments is all cove in, an’ the stringers is so rotten, you c’d spit through ’em. ’T ain’t safe fer a dawg tu cross. Darn sech s’lec’men — slackmen, that’s what I call ’em.”

Uncle Lisha found a seat, with others exempted by age from an active part in the labors of the bee, on a pile of rafters where they might sit to comment and criticise undisturbed till toward the end of the raising.

Their attention was divided between the active movements of the carpenter, a group of the athletes of the company endeavoring to get up a wrestling match, and a party of boys playing an old-fashioned game of ball.

“You’d better save yer stren’t’h fer liftin’,”

was Gran'ther Hill's hoarsely whispered advice to the wrestlers. "Ye'll need all ye got, fer the' hain't none tew many men. Them boys a-straddlin' an' a-yawpin' raound hain't no 'caount. It's a heavy frame considerin' the way trees hes dwindled sen' I was on airth. It's lucky they hev, fer ye could n't raise an ol'-fashioned buildin' wi' the men they've got nowerdays. Ye'd better keep yer wrastlin' till arter raisin'."

Solon Briggs slid himself onto the rafter close beside Uncle Lisha, and began speaking in a voice that could not be overheard. "That narrowtyve you was relatin' of was turrible interestin', Uncle Lisher. Du you s'pose you could designate the spot where the ol' gentleman clim', er thought he clim' the tree?"

The old shoemaker looked a moment at Solon, and then sent a roving glance along the towering mountain wall, its lower steepes rising like a mist of tender green to the bristling firs that climbed in dark array up the rugged steepes, to the bald, gray peak.

"Good airth and seas, Solon," he said at last, turning his face again to his interlocutor. "Ef ye knowed within a mild, ye might as well hunt fer a needle in a hay maow. It must ha' ben east o' aour ol' place. Ye know where that is?"

"An' proberbly," said Solon, "he was persecutin' his s'arch in the same direction er p'int o' compasses?"

“Wal, I s’pose so, more towards the top. Why, you hain’t a-goin’ huntin’ arter the money be ye, Solon?”

“Good land o’ massy, no,” cried Solon nervously.

“’Cause ef ye be, I’ve hearn him say ’at he barried it by a big yaller birch, an’ that’s consid’able of a guide, bein’ there hain’t more’n fifty yaller birches tu the acre up that way.”

“Naow then, men,” the carpenter shouted in an authoritative voice, “come right this way,” and there was a general movement toward the place indicated.

“Take a holt o’ this ’ere bent.”

The men swarmed upon the sills and sleepers and laid hold of the section of frame.

“Be ye ready? Then up with it. All together. Hang tu the foot o’ them pos’s, you men wi’ the crowbars. Up she goes.”

The parallelogram of heavy timbers rose at first almost with a jerk, then more slowly, as it was reared beyond the reach of some.

“Put in your pike-poles there,” cried the carpenter, and these being set and manned, it started upward again more rapidly, then more slowly as it reached the perpendicular. The carpenter was off one side squinting at it.

“Up with her, more! Don’t be afeared. Put in some pike-poles t’ other side. Up a leetle more.

A lee-tle more. There, whoa up. All right. She 's up an' daown as a clever cat's tail. Naow, stay lath it."

The bent was temporarily fastened in place with boards nailed diagonally upon it and the sills, and so in turn the others were raised and the girts entered and pinned. Then the long plates were uplifted by strong hands and pike-poles and shoved along the beams, to which the surest-footed of the company mounted and raised them to their place on top of the posts and fastened them.

All the while a running fire of jokes was kept up, not a few of which were directed against the carpenter, whose orders nevertheless were implicitly obeyed.

Now the corps of exempts and invalids were dislodged from their comfortable post on the pile of rafters. These were sent aloft, joined in pairs, and raised. Then Jonathan Young, standing apart, drawn to his fullest height and with arms akimbo, and puffing out his cheeks with a long exhalation of satisfaction, looked with pride upon the gaunt, yellow skeleton of his barn, and prospectively clothed it with boards and shingles, and filled it to repletion with hay and grain, and heard the swallows twittering under the eaves, or saw them darting with unerring flight in and out of the gable swallow-holes, which reminded him to call the carpenter.

“Don’t forget to make some swaller-holes fer luck, Simeon, an’ cut ’em in the shape of a heart,” and he glanced back to the house door, where his wife stood with her daughters, gazing at the gaunt structure that already dominated the premises, quite overbearing the humble log house. They wished it was the frame of a new house.

Jonathan’s half-grown son came along the path newly worn from the house, but henceforth to be an established way, bearing a great tin pail of cider, bending away from his burden, with free arm outstretched, with head bent low, staggering and bracing against the weight, which he stopped often to shift from hand to hand. A tin cup, voyaging to and fro on the foamy surface, touched the shores with hospitable clinks, till it was swamped and went down to the shining bottom. The pail came first to John Dart, who eyed the sunken cup for a moment, and declaring, “There’s more ’n one way to skin a cat,” lifted the pail to his lips. Then some one rescued the cup with a hooked stick, and drafts were more easily obtainable if less copious. The company, comfortably and conveniently seated on the sills of the barn, were now served with cakes, pie, and cheese.

“When I was on airth fust,” said Gran’ther Hill, dipping up a second cupful, “the’ wa’n’t no cider to speak on. It was rum tu bees; New

England rum er Jamaiky sperits fer high duck duin's. Cider 'll du, but it hain't so sartin as rum an' it's bulkier. I don't cal'late a man c'd du much fightin' wi' tew three quarts o' cider a-swashin' raound inside on him. Rum was what we useter du it on. When John Stark was a-raisin' men fer Ben'n't'n he was in more of a pucker fer rum 'an he was fer paowder an' lead. But he got both an' the Hessians tew, er leastways, we did," and he comforted himself with another draught, pronouncing it "good for the time o' year."

Eunice Young felt flattered by the returning empty pans and plates. She was sure the supply had been bountiful, now she knew its quality was approved.

The boys rushed back to their unfinished game of "two old cat." The wrestlers, refreshed in strength and spirits, tussled in "back holt," "side holt," and "arm's length," in the center of an interested ring of spectators. The sedate elders kept their seats, smoking and boasting of their youthful deeds.

As the afternoon waned and the barn's new shadow crawled on its first journey toward the house, thoughts of the evening chores fell upon the conviviality of the company, and they began to depart, till there were none left on the late busy scene; only Jonathan, still viewing with pride his

new possession, and the carpenter picking up his scattered tools and planning work for the morrow.

As Solon and Antoine plodded across the fields in company, the first said: "Wal, Antwine, I've got the p'int's o' compasses from Uncle Lisher nigh 'nough so 's we can make 'em corroborate wi' the place where that aire money's hid. You're useter the woods 'an what I be an' I want you tu du the engineerin' an' I'll work the divinin' rod. I've got me a superguberous one 'at I cut from the north side of a witch hazel bush."

"Bah gosh," cried Antoine, "Ah'll can Injin near an' Injin' far. Ah'll was be prefick Injin in de hwood, me. We'll go to-morrah mawnin', ant it?"

"Wal, yes, I guess we'd better, an' we'll git an airly start an' meet up back o' the ol' Peggs place. You fetch a spade an' I'll bring a crow-bar an' a bite o' suthin' tu eat."

"All raght, M'sieu Brigg."

"Bone swear, Antwine;" and each went his separate way home.

CHAPTER XVII.

TREASURE SEEKERS.

THE morning after the raising, Solon and Antoine appeared almost at the same time near the site of the old Peggs homestead where Uncle Lisha's father lived and died and where he himself was born and passed his boyhood — a place desolate with complete desertion, telling yet its mutely pathetic story of the years when it was stirred with busy life. It was told by the ruined chimney and broken hearthstone, the crumbling wall of the cellar, now a shallow, shapeless pit; the sprawling lilacs and blossoming fox lilies, long since run wild away from the sunken doorstep; told by the leaning crotched post that once upheld the creaking sweep of the well, to which no path led now; by the untrimmed, sprouty-rooted cherry-trees, straggling along the fallen wall that was matted by gall-bulbed stalks of golden-rod, lopped upon it by the winter snows, and by the rank tansy bed, the dry, brown heads overshadowing the young leaves that no more furnished medicine for the sick or garniture for the dead.

The treasure seekers turned their backs on the

scene without giving it a sentimental thought, and pressing through the second growth that selvaged the forest, began to climb the lower slopes of the mountain. The moss-patched and lichen-clad trunks of the ancient forest now rose all about them, — great maples, beeches, and poplars, with here and there a fir that had straggled down from its brethren of the heights, and huge, yellow birches shagged with rustling manes, from writhed roots to lofty branches.

Whenever Solon drew near to one of these he walked slowly, holding his forked divining rod with the point upward, a prong in either hand, with his palms turned inward, while Antoine carried the grosser tools, the spade and bar.

It was laborious traveling over the ankle-deep moss and the loose rocks, and climbing the prostrate trunks in all stages of decay, and scaling ledges that barred their way.

At length they reached a little plateau where flourished a colony of yellow birches about the hoary patriarch of their tribe.

Solon studied the place with increasing satisfaction. "This looks as if it might be the very spot, an' I'm goin' tu try it thorer. You've kep' the line, hain't you, Antwine?"

"Jes' as straight as a bee was, Ah bet you head."

Antoine sat down upon a log, dropped his tools

beside him and filled his pipe, while his companion, holding his divining rod before him and curiously watched by the Canadian, marched with slow and stately steps around the great birch.

"I know it 'll work on silver," he said, "fer I hove a quarter int' the grass in the do'yard, an' when I come over it, it most wrung the bark off."

Perfect silence pervaded the forest about them; not even the querulous cry of the ubiquitous jay or the jeer of an impudent squirrel was heard in their neighborhood, and afar off above them on the mountain only the ceaseless surging moan of the wind-swept evergreens. It seemed, indeed, as if the invisible spirits of the under world might be guarding here the treasure so long since committed to their care by the old Ranger.

Solon had gone twice around the great tree, each time widening the circle, when, uttering a joyful exclamation, he suddenly stood still and stared like one entranced on the earth before him, to which the tip of his hazel twig was pointing.

"Come here, Antwine," he cried; "drive yer crowbar right in there. My goodness me! I e'd n't hol' it! It jest flopped ri' daown in spite on me! I du b'lieve we've faoun' the identicle place!"

Antoine drove his bar into the ground and left it standing by itself, while he stood back rubbing his hands and crying out joyfully:—

“We ’ll mos’ gat it. Ah, Solem! Fus’ Ah ’ll bought it hoss an’ woggin an’ t’ree dog, an’ watch, an’ git caplock on mah gaun, an’ bought it hol’ hwoman caleckko red dress an’ kish lip,¹ Ah do’ know ’f he be yaller or red. An’ pork t’ree time a day an’ more onion Ah ’ll min’ to, an’ mud turkey, an’ Ah ’ll goin’ Canada vis’tin’ an’ Montreal. An’ Ah ’ll goin’ built it white haouse wid green blindin’, an’ bought it two honderd nacre lan’ an’ set in de settin’ room an’ see de mens work, an’ smoke all de tam w’en Ah ’ll ant heat.”

“I hain’t ezackly settled in my mind haow I shall investigate my funds,” Solon declared when he had an opportunity to speak, “but le’ ’s duff in a-diggin’ an’ see what we got. But you wanter remember one thing, Antwine,” he said very impressively, “if ever we du strike the money you must n’t speak a audible, laoud word afore we git a holt on ’t er it ’ll slide intu the baowels o’ the airth.”

“Oh, no, no-no-no. Ah ’ll won’t spoke no more as snaikes,” wherewith they fell to digging with great enthusiasm.

The ground was composed of loose rock more than soil, and the digging was slow and laborious, but the crowbar and spade clinked merrily, awakening echoes that had never before found voice in that green solitude, and at last attracted a party

¹ Kid slippers.

of jays that for a while kept up a discordant and annoying outcry above the delvers and then flew screaming away, as if to proclaim to all the forest that strange work was going on within it.

They had sunk a little pit somewhat deeper than their knees, when Antoine, driving his bar deep into a crevice, struck something which gave forth a sharp, metallic sound.

Solon shook his open hand at Antoine to beat back the exclamation that the suddenly parted lips foretold, but too late.

“Oh, mon Dieu, we ’ll gat it!” he cried, and the words were followed by a smothered clink and rumble.

“There,” Solon groaned, sinking back on the edge of the pit and casting his spade from him as a thing of no further use. “Naow you’ve done it! It’s moved, an’ jest on accaount o’ your darned, useless, onsensible Canuck gabble. Darn ye tu altermutttable darnation!”

Antoine looked dismayed, then defiant.

“Bah gosh, all feesh hooks! You s’pose mans goin’ shut off hees head so long he ’ll fregit de nowse of hees vowse? Bah gosh, no, Ah guess not me, not for feefty, fave honded, fave tousan’ dollar!”

“No, you ’d rather gab, gab, gab, ’an tu hev the hull world, you infarnal, eternal, intarnal, extarnal fool!” Solon groaned and howled in de-

spair and wrath. "An' we most the same as hed it. Oh, by thunder! I'm as good a minter lick ye as ever I had t' eat!"

He made a half-threatening movement, and Antoine scrambled out of the hole and got behind a tree, where he looked forth with craned neck, as if expecting the explosion of a blast.

"'F Ah'll gat mad, Solem! you'll ant leek me pretty heasy, an' Ah'll gat mad pooty quick 'f Ah'll tried. Den you'll wan' ta' careful, fer Ah'll was danger mans, me. Br-o-o-o-o-o!"

He uttered a terrible growl and pranced a little way from his cover, but was disappointed that this demonstration made no impression on Solon.

"Ah tol' you, Solem," he said in a more peaceful tone, "'f you can fetch back dat moneys fer givin' me leekin', Ah'll willin'. But dat ain't gat no difference. You leek me, it gone jes' the sem. De bes' way was fer come aout an' heat aour deeny? Come."

"I guess that's a sensible idee," Solon conceded, climbing out of the hole and picking up his coat, from the pocket of which he drew forth a packet of luncheon and tossed Antoine's coat to him. Then they sat down upon a mossy log and began an amicable repast, Solon supplementing his companion's coarse and meagre fare with portions of his own bountiful supply.

"Ah an't see mah hoss an' dawg an' watch an'

white haouse an' Canada half so plain Ah was while ago," said Antoine ruefully.

"I tell ye what, Antwine," Solon said between mouthfuls, waving his jack-knife towards the scene of their labors, "when we git aour victuals eat, I'm goin' tu try the rod ag'in. It looks philosophicable tu me 'at ef you can find it once you can ag'in, an' ef we du, you keep your hed shet."

"Ah 'll will, seh, Solem. What Ah 'll goin' spoke, Ah 'll mek notion. Sh-s-s-h," suddenly sinking his voice to a whisper and pointing to a little black animal moving awkwardly and aimlessly about the border of a yew thicket near them, "See dat black woodchuck. See me struck it wid a stone."

Stooping cautiously, he picked up a fragment of a rock and threw it with such true aim that it struck the animal full in the side, evoking a sharp, snarling cry of pain and anger. Almost at the same moment there was a crashing rush in the tangle of brush above, as Antoine breathlessly asked: "What mek dat nowse?" and a great she-bear came lunging out of the thicket with a fierce and startling "woof, woof."

As if simultaneously impelled by the impetus of her charge, both men sprang to their feet and went tearing down the ragged mountain-side at a breakneck pace, wondering at their own sureness

of foot, and silently praying it might be further vouchsafed them, as they plunged from rock to rock, snatching at trees and saplings, and leaping over prostrate trunks that they had slowly climbed over in their ascent.

Never did men maintain a better pace over such a course, and it was kept up till they emerged, blown, torn and trembling, into the clearing, and sank down on the first cradle-knoll. Coats and tools were left far behind, nor even remembered till now they were half rested. Antoine arose, straightening his stiffening legs, and after listening a moment shook his fist at the mountain.

“Damn dat bears. ’F he’ll come aout here Ah’ll leek it, me.”

“I p’sume tu say ’f you want her very bad you’ll find her up back there. I don’t.”

Then they made their way homeward, chop-fallen, yet in a measure thankful. A few days later they made an expedition for the recovery of their things, whose disappearance was causing domestic comment, and Solon tried the magic power of his rod, but it made no sign.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISFITS.

“IT’s turrible resky a-gittin’ one thing ’at’s a leetle cuter ’n the rest o’ yer belongin’s,” Uncle Lisha remarked as he split some pegs off a block with his jack-knife. “Oncte I got me a new awl ’at put me clean aout ’n consait o’ my ol’ kit, an’ cost me more’n a month’s airnin’s a-buyin’ new tools ’at I didn’t need, an’ some on ’em jest useless consarns.

“I’ve knowed a feller tu git a patch sot on a boot ’at looked so much better’n the rest on ’t ’at he hed tu git a new pair an’ then a suit o’ clo’s tu match, an’ then his womern must up an’ hev a new caliker gaownd. But the beatinest was Ros’l Drake’s door, a bran new front door ’at he bid off tu Amos Wilkinses vandue. Do’ know haow Amos come tu hev it, but he hed it, an’ Ros’l he bid it off, an’ took it hum an’ sot it in the barn, and at fust his womern sputtered ’baout his buyin’ of it, an’ they hed a notion o’ puttin’ on ’t in the place o’ their ol’ front door, but it would n’t fit, an’ they cal’lated ef it did it ’ould make the hul haouse look humbler ’n ever. But it would n’t

du to waste that aire door, 'at was paneled an' hed a big brass knocker, an' so what d' they du finally but turn tu an' build them a new haouse tu fit that aire door, which the ol' one was plenty good 'nough.

"Wal," he continued, after brushing the split pegs from the edge of the bench into his hand, "they hed tu mortgage the' place, an' finally lost it, ol' haouse, new haouse, front door an' all, an' went off over intu Adams's Gore tu live in a lawg haouse, an' glad 'nough tu git sech shelter.

"Over in the Gore, the rusters don't begin tu crow 'fore ten o'clock in the forenoon, an' the hens go tu rust right arter dinner, an' you c'n allers tell Gore folks when they come daown here in dog-days, by the' stompin' the' feet tu git the snow off on 'em. That's where the door landed them."

"Dat mek me rembler one man Canada," said Antoine.

"Consarn ye, Ann Twine, what in tunket's the reason ye don't never tell your stories fust?"

"Ah 'll save de pie an' kek for de en' of de dinny," said Antoine with a bland smile.

"Pies an' lies they be mostly," Uncle Lisha growled; and Antoine began:—

"Dar was one man Canada gone off fer work one mornin' hairly, an' he'll see it one leetly waum walkin' aout on de road fer smell de mornin' hair.

“ W'en dat mans see he 'll say, Ah 'll goin' fee-shins, me. An' he 'll peek it up an' go raght off an' get hees hookin line an' go on de river an' t'row hees hook, an' it ant more as two minute 'fore peeckerel was took it, oh, great beeg one. An' de log was slippy de man was stan' on, an' he was pull on de water an' all draown dead.

“ So you see, seh, boy, jes' for leetly waum dat mans was loss hees day work, an' dat beeg peeckerel — dat was too bad — an' more as half hees laf-tam, for he 'll was be young man an' was goin' be marre nex' week, so he loss hees waf too, an' all de funs of de weddin'. Ant dat good many for one leetly waum, hein ? ”

Pelatiah sighed wearily as he thought of the crueller fate that had cheated him of his wedding day.

“ But ef yer story was true, Ann Twine,” said the shoemaker, driving a peg home with each blow of his hammer, — “ which it ain't anyways likely it is, bein' you tol' it, — it don't argy ag'in' a feller's goin' a-fishin' when he 'd ort tu, an' I b'lieve I 'd ort tu the fust good day 'at comes, an' I want you tu go along tew, Peltier.”

As his abstracted gaze habitually sought the dusty window, the blurred panes did not shut out from him a vision of clear streams braiding the sunlight into the shadows of copses and green brookside banks, inviting the weary heart and

hand to rest and quiet recreation. He felt an almost painful heart twinge that reminded him of long bygone boyish anticipation.

“It can’t quite tech the ol’ spot,” he thought to himself, “but thinkin’ o’ fishin’ an’ goin’ a-fishin’ comes nigher fetchin’ on ’t ’an most anythin’.” Then speaking aloud:—

“It’s a-hopesin’ ’at I won’t never git so I can’t go a-fishin’ whilst I ’ve got sense tu enj’y it. Lord, haow many times I think o’ ol’ Kit Jarvis a-tryin’ tu go a-traoutin’ arter he got blind as a bat. He was a master hand for huntin’ an’ fishin’ an’ a mate o’ yer father, Jozeff, when I was a boy.

“But whilst he was a tough, hearty man, he begin tu git blind. It wa’n’t fellums on his eyes, for they looked jest as nat’ral ’s ever they did, on’y when he was a-talkin’ tu you, they would n’t hit you, but p’int off tu one side mebb’y an’ be shut when he was a-listenin’ tu ye. But he would go a-huntin’ arter he got so ’s ’t he could n’t tell a barn from a haystack, an’ they said he shot a pa’tridge by the saound of her quit-quittin’, an’ he’d go kerwack ag’in’ a tree afore he see it, an’ cuss a spell an’ then laugh an’ make fun of hisself.

“But he gin up huntin’ arter he ’d shot Peltier’s gran’ther’s yullin’ fer a deer. ‘Never knowed my gun tu cut up sech a caper as that afore,’ says he, ‘an’ I won’t trust it no furdur.’

“But yit he would go a-traoutin’, an’ us boys,

the Lord forgive us, useter laugh tu see him a-pawin' wi' one hand fer suthin' 'at wa'n't there, an' a-pokin' his stick julluk a pismire feelin' its way 'mongst strange things, an' stan'in' harkin' fer saounds julluk a hawg in a cornfiel' an' mebbly tost his hook ontu a lawg or rock, an' wait an' wait fer a bite. I wonder the Lord did n't strike us mis'able leetle torments blind, but mebbly 't was 'cause we useter onsnag his hook fer him an' on-snarl his line, an' led him tu the best holes, an' mebbly 't was cause He don't take much 'caount o' sech leetle, onsignificant critters' duin's.

"Arter a spell he gin it up, jest oncte in a while tu set by the mill pawnd an' fish for chubs an' dace. 'I e'n feel 'em bite an' pull, an' hear 'em floppin' in the grass, an' they smell like fish, an' it's better 'n nothin' ef 't ain't much fun,' says he, 'an' I 'spect it 'muses the minnies tu see sech a ol' dodunk a-tryin' to ketch 'em.'

"When it come his turn to die I guess he was glad on 't. 'I ben the same as dead this ten year,' says he, 'the world a-rattlin' raound me 'thaout no more 'caount on me 'an if I wa'n't in 't, my own flesh an' blood grown up 'thaout my knowin' haow they look, er seein' my ol' womern's face er my nighest friend, er seein' the grass an' the trees leaf aout er shed the' leaves, er ever p'intin' a gun er hookin' a traout, an' jest a-settin' an' harkin' in the everlastin' dark! It's lun-

some, I tell ye. A blind man 's uselesser 'n a dead man, an' you can't bury him aout'n the way an' be perlite.'

"When he was dead he looked turrible contented, Jozeff, an' yer father, says he, 'Kit, I wish 't I knowed whether you c'n see tu sight yer rifle naow.' An' I guess it's suthin' we 'd all give consid'able tu know.

"Wal, it's hopesin' the dark won't overtake none o' us afore it's time tu go tu sleep fer good, an' naow I'm goin' tu shut up shop."

CHAPTER XIX.

A RAINY DAY.

It was a May day with April weather. The rain had poured down in intermittent showers during the night. In the morning the rising sun transmuted the gray mist to floating gold, and turned the tremulous strings of sun-drops on every bending twig to resplendent jewels.

The sheep began to scatter over the pastures, mumbling out calls to their lambs as they cropped the wet grass.

But the robins sang vociferously for more rain; the sun veiled itself with a drifting cloud, bordering it with gold, and shooting from behind it broad, divergent, watery bolts; a film of shower was trailed along the mountain-side; the blotches of sunlight narrowed and faded into the universal sombre gray, and, after a brief pattering prelude, the rain poured down again, and swept across the blurred landscape in majestic columns, that fled along the earth while they upheld the narrow sky.

Then it stopped as suddenly as it began, the sun shone out and revived the drowned splendor of the earth, the bedraggled robins sang again,

and the murmur of the swollen brooks rose and fell more distinctly with the puffs and lulls of the inconstant wind. Then the sky would darken and blot out the patches of blue and the half-built arch of a rainbow, and the new showers chase away the straggling sunbeams, and the pour of the downfall overbear all other sounds.

Thus it was pouring, when Uncle Lisha came into the shop from the house and put on his apron, stooping low as he tied the strings to look out through the blurred panes upon the narrow landscape. He saw the innumerable jets of the puddles leaping up to meet the rain, the pelted, dodging leaves of the plum and cherry trees bending over their fallen blossoms, that, like untimely snow, lay beneath them, where a group of fowls stood, bedraggled and forlorn, with shortened necks and slanted tails.

Beyond, all objects became flattened and more indistinct till, in the gray background, mountain and sky met and dissolved in each other.

An umbrella was coming up the road, dodging from side to side as the bearer avoided puddles and sprang across rivulets. The misty fabric materialized into blue cotton, and presently entered the shop, closed, with its depressed point streaming like a conduit, followed by Pelatiah, who set it to dribble in a corner as he said, "Haow de do," and then, "Gosh," as a sufficient comment on the weather.

"I'm turrible glad you've come, Peltier," said Uncle Lisha, searching among his tools for his pipe, "fer it's a lunsome kinder day, an' I wa'n't expectin' nob'dy. It's kinder chilly, an' I don't b'lieve but what you'd better whittle up some kindlin' an' start a fire in the stove."

Nothing loath, Pelatiah got some wood from the box, and, kneeling before the stove, whittled some kindling, laid and lighted it, and, still kneeling, intently watched the slow progress of the flame.

"Wal," said the old man, looking at him with kindly anxiety, "haow be ye gittin' 'long? Feelin' any comf'tabler in yer mind?"

"It aches contin'al," Pelatiah answered.

"You don't go tu Hamner's no more?"

Pelatiah shook his head as he got on all fours to blow the reluctant fire, and answered, "Not sence you gin me a talkin' tu 'n under the bridge."

"You done almighty well, boy, an' you jest stick to 't. When you hain't tu work, you go a-fishin' as often 's ye can, an' when it gits so 't there hain't no fishin', go a-huntin', an' 'twixt 'em they'll fetch ye aout."

The two doors opened almost at the same moment, and Sam entered from the kitchen leading his now toddling boy, followed by his father, bringing in an ox-bow to whittle and scrape where litter offered no offence, while Solon and Antoine came in from the rainy outer world.

“Hoddy do, all de company?” Antoine saluted. “What you ’ll said ’bout fishin’s? Ah s’pose prob’ly you an’ Peltiet tink you felt pooty plump for ketch so much feesh, ant it?” He got beside the stove, steaming in the growing warmth, and preparing also to smoke. “Wal, seh, Onc’ Lasha, dat ant not’ing, not’ing for wat Ah ’ll do wen Ah leeve in Canada.”

“Naow lie, dum ye,” Uncle Lisha growled.

“Haow many tam,” Antoine demanded with grieved impressiveness, “Ah ’ll gat for tol’ you Ah ant never lie? M’sieu Mumpson, he ’ll read me ’baout George Washins son chawp a happletree wid hees new saw, an’ tol’ hees fader he ’ll do it ’cause he ’ll can’ lie. Ah ’ll chawp more as forty happple, prob’ly feefty tree ’fore Ah ’ll lie, me. Yas, sah. But Ah ’ll goin’ tol’ you. Great many tam, but one teekly tam Ah ’ll go feeshins an’ Ah ’ll trow meh hook wid nice waum on it an’ de traout was so hongry in hees belly an’ so crazy in hees head dey ’ll go after it so fas’, de fus one git it, de nex’ one touch hol’ hees mouf of dat one’s tail an’ de nex’ de sem way till dey was twenty prob’ly ’f dey ant fifteen all in string, an’ Ah ’ll pull it mos’ so hard Ah ’ll can’t, an’, seh, Ah ’ll gat all of it honly de middlin’ one was kan o’ slimmer, an’ broke off, so Ah ’ll loss de hine en’ of de row. Hol’ on,” as Uncle Lisha began to open his mouth, “Ah ’ll ant fineesh. W’en de traout

in de water see where Ah'll sot mah deesh of waum on de bank, he'll beegin jomp on de bank for gat it, an' tumble top of herself for gat it. Den seh, One' Lasha, Ah'll peek up mah deesh an' shook it, an' holly 'caday, caday,' an' dat traouts folla me home so fas' Ah'll had to run an' shut de door for keep it from feel up de haouse."

"Ann Twine," said Uncle Lisha, heaving a sigh of relief and sinking back into his seat till the leathern bottom creaked, "I was raly afeared you was a-goin' tu tell one o' your lies." Then bending over his work, and, as he drew the threads, setting his teeth hard, as if that might insure the perfect closing of the seam, he said, "I s'pose I c'n pooty nigh match ye, Ann Twine, on'y my story's true."

"Ah'll wan' hear you tol' jus' one o' dat kan, seh."

"Wal, oncte aout West, where I was in West-constant, the' was a man went an' chopped a hole in the ice in a crik tu water his cattle, an' there was a dozen bullpaouts come up in the hole, an' he begin a-heavin' on 'em aout tu kerry 'em hum fer his dinner, but, fust he knowed, it filled up full, an' he run tu git a bushel basket tu scoop 'em up, an' when he got back the hole was a-runnin' over wi' fish, jest a-b'ilin' over on t' the ice, an' kep' a-duin' so till they run over on t' the shore further an' further, till he begun tu be afeared

they 'd kiver up his farm an' spile it. But the folks begin tu hear on 't an' come wi' their teams f'm twenty mild off, an' hauled the bullpaouts away in reg'lar percessions, thirty forty sled-loads in a string, an' fed 'em to the' hawgs, an' m'nured the' land wi' them, till folks did n't know whether they was eatin' pork or fish, on'y fer bein' no bones, an' the hull country smelt like a fish kittle all summer."

Uncle Lisha looked around upon his audience, all of whom wondered silently, except Antoine, who asked : —

"You 'll see dat, Onc' Lasha ? "

"Wal, no ; it happened the winter afore I went there, an' I did n't ezactly see it, but I smelt it."

"Wal, you ant miss much, Onc' Lasha. It ant be much for see jes' few bullpawt. If Ah 'll ant gat so hol' Ah 'll fregit for rembler mos' all Ah 'll see, Ah could tol' you sometings."

"What's the reason you don't tell us more o' your experiences aout West, Uncle Lisher ? " Solon asked.

"What's the reason," the old man demanded, with a twinkle in his eye, "'at you an' Ann Twine don't tell us some o' your experiences up on the maountain t' other day ? "

The treasure seekers stared at each other in blank amazement, wondering how their secret

could have escaped their keeping, when in fact it was only shrewdly guessed at by their host.

"Why, we hain't got nothin' tu tell," said Solon at last.

"Wal, I hain't, nuther; not 'at appears wuth tellin'. Say, folks," during which the mischievous twinkle of his gray eyes brightened, "du you know 'at two men, which their names I won't call, went up on t' the maountain a-s'archin' arter money 'at the man 'at baried it hisself could n't find ag'in? Oh, the' 's fools an' allus will be, but I cal'late them two 's the beatin'."

"If the' was sech men, which I don't omit the' was," said Solon, breaking the awkward silence, "they wa'n't huntin' nothin' but onnat'ral cur'osities, er minnyrils, er Injin relishes. Wal," as a gleam of sunlight patched the littered floor and the baby struggled between his father's knees to reach it, "the sun is a-divulgin' aout, an' I guess I'll be a-moggin'. Goin' my way, Antwine?"

"Did they, raly?" Sam said, with a smile loadening on his face as the door closed behind them.

Uncle Lisha slowly nodded his head and Sam laughed outright, while the little boy reached for the intangible sunbeams.

"Can't git it, bubby, no more 'n they could. What they was arter," chuckled the old man.

CHAPTER XX.

JUNE TRAINING.

BESIDES beautifying the earth with the greenness of woods and fields, the bloom of innumerable flowers, and the sparkle of limpid yet unshrunk streams, and gladdening it with the songs of thronging birds as happy as the golden days were long, the first month of summer brought also upon its first Tuesday the June training.

In the year whereof this partial record is made the day was unseasonably ushered in, according to established usage, by the ceremony of "wakin' up off'cers." A party of the younger men made the rounds of the homes of those dignitaries, arousing them with volleys of musketry, when, if they were men of proper martial spirit, and alive to its encouragement, they would come forth with refreshment befitting warriors.

The cock's prolonged clarion notes were saluting the unfolding banner of dawn, when Captain Peck was awakened by a volley whose rattling thunder was intensified by wads of green grass rammed down on the double charges of powder.

The captain speedily made his appearance at

the door, rubbing his sleepy eyes with the back of a hand that held a tumbler, while the other bore a brown jug that coldly bumped his naked leg.

“ ‘Mornin’, gentlemen,” he said, in tones that strove valiantly through drowsiness to become hearty; “ hope I see ye well this mornin’. Walk right up an’ refresh yourselves.”

He essayed to advance toward them, but hastily withdrew his bare foot from the dewy doorstep.

“ Sarjint Daow, won’t you jest kinder take a holt o’ this an’ pass it ’raoun’? ”

The tall sergeant, setting his gun against the doorpost, swung the jug over his arm, and, with accurate judgment of his men, measured out to each a fiery charge suited to his calibre.

Then, with a lusty cheer for “ the cap’n in his uniform,” they departed to surprise as stealthily the lieutenants in their strongholds.

Meanwhile their commander bore the depleted jug to its cupboard, and the burden of military honor back to bed. He did not feel himself at all a hero when he curled up his legs in obedience to Mrs. Peck’s petulant command: —

“ Solerman Peck, take your col’ feet off ’m me. They ’re julluk tew frawgs. I don’t b’lieve it no part o’ military desiptyne fer a captain of a company to be a-galivantin’ raound in — his — shirt tail — in middle of er — night tu — tu — squer-

ronnk," and with a trumpet blast delightful to his ear she resumed her interrupted march into the land of Nod.

The beautiful day was not far advanced when the one street of the Forge village began to exhibit the half-indolent bustle of a country holiday. Boys were arriving, heated and panting from a haste that had not till now permitted them to stop even for the nursing of stubbed toes. One of Antoine's brown-skinned, black-poll'd brood carried a smooth bit of board on the hollow of his arm whereon were displayed twists of molasses candy, and already was crying his home-made confection in his father's own English: —

“Lassin candle. Two for cen' apiece.”

Militiamen came in, on foot and in wagons, and men straggled from one to another of the increasing groups on Hamner's stoop, the steps of Clapham's old store, and of the new and popular Bascom's, as interest or curiosity impelled them.

Here and there a man hurried about his belated chores. White-haired exempts sat at their doors, agape with languid, senile curiosity. Women in unwontedly early tidiness of dress went back and forth from house to house, bearing openly or under aprons some neglected or forgotten provisions for the day during which relatives or friends might desire entertainment.

A very fat and no less benevolent-looking old

man in a blue homespun frock, seated on a tali-backed, splint-bottomed chair, in a lumber wagon that also held a barrel of spruce beer behind him, drove his fat and sedate old horse near to the front of Hamner's hostelry, and clambering carefully down over the stout thill, unhitched his horse and led it away.

"Wal," said one housewife, as she dropped the rush curtain under which she had watched him, "I guess the' hain't no daoubt but what it's trainin' day, fer ol' Beedle 's come, an' he 's sot up elus tu Hamner's. Won't that rile Hamner? But it don't make no dif'ence, his cust'mers ain't hankerin' arter spreuce beer."

Old Beedle, coming back, removed the end board from his wagon and made a counter of it whereon he placed his tumblers, shoved the tap of the cask beyond the end of the box, took out the chair, seated himself comfortably, and proclaimed his readiness to serve customers with beer at one cent a glass, counting the change that he carried in a canvas shot-bag, while he awaited their coming.

Not far off a little board booth that had grown the day before began to blossom out with yellow cakes of gingerbread, a jar of striped candy and green tumblers of lemonade, which attracted many flies and a few boys to its rough counter.

Then Joseph Hill and his father drove in,

with the long gun aslant, the son being permitted to carry it to-day in such honorable service, for so the veteran regarded it, though "June trainin'" was becoming a mere farce among a people whose martial spirit seemed almost dead.

Sam Lovel marched past in his long-strided, fox-hunting gait, followed by Pelatiah with downcast eyes, bearing his irksome gun. Time was when he looked forward with a thrill of pride to the day Lowizy should see him adroitly practicing his lesson in the art of war, but that was an ended dream. Now, Stony and Beaver Meadow brooks were calling him with concerted babble, and he would rather go a-fishing than join in this foolery, or, rather still, go out to battle to die, and forget, and perchance draw one tear from those blue eyes that were always haunting him.

Captain Peck, scarcely recognizable by those to whom he had first appeared that morning, was proudly conspicuous on Hamner's stoop in a square-topped, broad-visored cap with a red, white, and blue pompon, enormous yellow epaulettes on the shoulders of his tightly buttoned blue claw-hammer coat, and white trousers incased legs that were frequently entangled with the scabbard of his huge sword. His first lieutenant wore a bell-crowned beaver hat and a blazing red coat, a relic of some defunct uniformed company, while his junior in rank was designated only by a huge

red sash encircling his loins and the cavalry sabre depending from it. The fifer and drummer sat on the steps toying with their instruments, with a group of boys gaping in tireless expectancy before them. Sergeant Dow lingered near, awaiting orders, without a trace of drowsiness from his self-imposed early duties.

The captain endeavored to draw his watch from its padded fortifications, but failed, and went to consult Hamner's clock. "Sarjint Daow," he called, as he bustled forth, "you can fall in the men naow."

At the word, the drummer began to rattle the call familiarly set to the words, "Uncle Dan, Uncle Dan, Uncle Dan, Dan, Dan," and the men came straggling into line, a few ready and alert, but the greater part listless and careless, and some bearing only clubs and broomsticks in place of proper weapons.

Standing stiff as a ramrod at the head of his rank, Sam looked with supreme disgust on these military mummers who should have withered under the fiery indignation of Gran'ther Hill's glances.

"You 'd orter be court-marsheld an' shot, blast ye!" he growled, "an' so ye would ha' ben, ef ye lived when folks hed spunk tu du anythin'," and he shook his impotent staff. "Pooty critters you be tu make sojers on!"

It gave him some comfort to see his own gun, upheld by his son, towering like a naked color-staff in the centre of the line.

"Jozeff hain't turrible hefty on sojerin', but he kerries a gun 'at 's used to the business, anyway," he remarked to those about him.

Uncle Lisha, standing by his side, uttered in snorts and ejaculations his grief and indignation at the spectacle of the unsoldierly bearing of men whose fathers had so gallantly borne the ever-green emblem of Vermont through the storm of Plattsburgh fight.

At last the company was got into line and partially straightened by the united efforts of all the officers, in pulling a man here and pushing another there; then they faced to the right. The fifer rocked back and forth from foot to foot to assure himself of the time, the order was given to march, fife and drum struck up "Yankee Doodle," and, with an irregular tramp of fourscore pairs of feet, the Floodwood Company of Danvis went marching down the street, all the boys running beside it, the women waving their handkerchiefs, and the captain's pompon bobbing proudly before it.

Then it was countermarched, and, returning to Hamner's, halted there and went through some antique manual of arms, during the performance of which some who felt the need of refreshment after such arduous service dashed out of the

ranks and into the bar-room and presently reappeared wiping their lips, to leisurely resume their places without reprimand.

The men were soon dismissed for their noon-ing, and a cordial invitation was given by the genial Bascom, to all who would, to partake of a free lunch of crackers and cheese at his store, thereby greatly increasing his own popularity and depreciating that of his less patriotic rival, who sat almost alone in the shadow of his own store, placidly awaiting his foreseen time, as he said softly to himself:—

“That feller’s got pretty nigh the len’th o’ his rope. He won’t be givin’ away crackers an’ cheese nex’ trainin’.”

The captain dined at Hamner’s with his officers and most aspiring privates. Cap’n Hill and Uncle Lisha were honored guests of village friends to whom they told stories of the warlike days of which they had been a part. The larger number of the militiamen having providently brought their rations in pockets, tin pails, and baskets, gathered in picnicking groups at centres most convenient for the irrigation of their dry fare, some squatting on the platforms of pumps and well-curbs, where the gulping crescendo of the one and the splash and bump of the other’s bucket often interrupted or overbore the flow of joke and repartee.

Some roosted on the thills and other available perches afforded by old Beedle's wagon, where draughts of the spicy beer were within easy reach, and some, burning with a valiant thirst that neither water nor beer could subdue, occupied the thinned benches in the noontide shade of Hamner's stoop, firing volleys of wit at each other and at the boys who stole past them to gaze on the captain's sword that now hung peacefully behind the bar, while its owner wielded meaner weapons against the sacred rage of hunger.

A horde of boys swarmed about the benevolent old Beedle who dispensed smiles and kindly words with his foaming glasses of innocuous beer and always gave the right change for every "fo' pen's hap'ny," though its Spanish blazonry of pillars and scroll was quite effaced. And boys crowded about the booth in eager purchase of the choky but delicious gingerbread, as yellow as old gold and of greater worth to their hungry stomachs.

Meanwhile there was hospitable clatter of plates, knives, and forks in every wayside house, the sound whereof made hungrier every passer-by.

"A turrible free-hearted creetur'!" said one of Bascom's guests to a fellow-soldier, jerking his head sidewise toward the smiling proprietor, while he turned a fresh cracker in search of the best point of attack, "an' 'pears tu be a candid sort

o' man, but it beats all natur haow he's borryin' of ev'yb'dy."

"N'yum, n'yum, n'yum," mumbled his full-mouthed comrade with assenting nods.

"Yis, borryin' of ev'b'dy," continued the other. "Why they say 't he's borryed \$300 of the Buttles gals 'at they'd laid up a-tailorin', withaout a mite o' security. Poor ol' critters, fifty year ol' the youngest on 'em is. All they'd got saved up. Hope they won't lose it, but I d' know."

Sam, overhearing them, raised his eyes from the smoked herring he was peeling, to study the face of his friend Bascom, a genial, beaming face, with restless eyes that met another's but for an instant; but surely there was no guile in it.

During the nooning, the village street so nearly resumed its ordinary peaceful aspect that Joel Bartlett, clad in his Quaker garb, appeared in it as a not incongruous figure, mounted on a wagon load of grain and driving sedately toward the mill. Millers being exempt from military duty, and but few grists being likely to come to the mill on this day, it seemed a propitious one for Joel. He was suspected by some of possessing a worldly, unconfessed love for music, embracing even the martial strains of the fife and drum.

As he slowly turned the corner, holding an attentive ear, and casting a wistful, furtive glance up the main street, he attracted the notice of

Beri Burton, whom frequent calls at Hamner's bar had made pot-valiant and more than usually aggressive.

"See that aire dumb sneakin' Quaker," he mumbled, with one-half a doughnut in his mouth while he pointed at Joel with the other half. "Goldumb Quaker, ridin' roun' comf'ble, when better men's sarvin' the country. Goldumb ef I don't make him git daown off 'm his waggin an' shoulder my muskit." And starting up from the group with which he was lunching, with long, shambling strides, he advanced rapidly toward Joel, shouting vociferously, "Hol' on thar, you Bartlett, I got somep'n fer tu tell ye."

When Joel became aware that he was addressed, he drew rein and awaited Beri's approach, asking quietly as the other came beside the wagon: —

"Was thee a-wishin' to speak tu me, friend Burton?"

"Yis, I be," growled Beri, "but I hain't none o' your 'friend Burton.' I want you tu git ri' daown here."

"No, I thank thee, I don't feel drawn tu git daown," Joel answered. "I can converse quite freely where I be."

"Goldumb ye, you will feel drawed down 'f ye don't pile off 'm thar. What business you got a-ridin' raoun' wi' your dumb drab broad-brim elos' when decent folks is a-duin' thar dooty.

You gotter git ri' daown here an' shoulder a muskit like a hones' man oncte in yer sneakin' life."

His brawny hand grasped one of Joel's butter-nut-dyed stockings and Joel drew the other close under his haunch.

"I'm a man of peace," he said, "and hev no call tu handle carnal weepens."

"You come daown er I'll pull ye daown, I will."

"Oh, you'd better let him be, Beri," mildly expostulated a militiaman who had drawn near. "He hain't 'bliged to train, ye know, an' ef we wa'n't, we would n't."

Beri's answer was a more vigorous jerk of the enthralled member.

"If thee yanks me so hard, friend Beri," said Joel calmly, "my t' other foot is lierble to slip, an' ef it should hit thee in the face an' hurt thee, I should feel grieved."

Beri pulled more savagely, roaring, "Come off 'm thar."

Joel, as he slid a little from his lofty seat, let fly his loose foot full in the face of his uncouth adversary, who, staggering backward with his hand to his battered nose, howled with pain and rage.

"Dumb ye," he roared, glowering darkly up over his bruised features, and making feeble de-

monstrations in the same direction, "I'm a good minter break yer neck."

"Friend Beri, I hope my foot won't slip ag'in, but ef it does I hain't answerable."

"Goldumb ye, I won't dirty my fingers wi' yer Quaker carkiss. I've hed a wolf's foot in my maouth, an' a Quaker's hoof in my face, an' I do' want no wus disgrace."

Joel's contracted brow and closely puckered lips relaxed, and his face assumed its usual placidity as he resumed his seat, and chirruping to his horses they moved sedately onward, while Beri shambled away, as much abashed as it was in his nature to be.

Joel had the miller and mill to himself for half the afternoon, but it was noticeable that when the company paraded for afternoon drill, and fife and drum struck up "The White Cockade," "Yankee Doodle," and their one other tune, "The Road to Boston," he took himself out of the noise of the mill clack and rushing water, and with his back resolutely turned to the music gazed into space in abstracted meditation.

At about one o'clock the drum resumed its monotonous iteration of "Uncle Dan," and "the sinners of war," as their commander flatteringly styled them, wandered again into crooked alignment, shouldered arms, marched and countermarched, wheeled right and left like a wave-

tossed seine, "charged bay'net," to the affright of the scurrying host of boys, and at last, at four o'clock, "p'ised arms" and disbanded; and the farree of "June trainin'" was ended.

After buzzing about for a while with as little purpose as a swarm of flies, the greater part of the militiamen and spectators departed, while some lingered to do forgotten errands or regale themselves with the seductive sweets of gossip and strong waters at Hamner's.

Bevies of boys trudged homeward shrilly recounting the events of the day. Old Beedle went jolting over the highway, his empty cask rumbling and his well-filled shot bag chinking a tune very pleasant to his ears.

Sam, Pelatiah, and Antoine bore each other company homeward.

"By the gret horn spoon!" the first exclaimed, "I'll stay tu hum an' pay my fine afore I'll jine sech foolin' ag'in. It gits wus an' wus every year, a-pomponadin' back an' tu like a passel o' sheep, every man duin' jest as he's a mind tu, an' larnin' nothin'. I'd ruther stay tu hum an' du nothin' er work in Huld's posy bed."

"I'd ruther go a-fishin'," said Pelatiah, regretfully, as his wistful eyes followed the winding copses and straggling ranks of elms that marked the courses of his favorite streams. "An' what's the use o' trainin', anyway? The' won't never

be no more fightin'. It 's gone aout o' fashion, seems 'ough."

"It won't never, I'm afeard, till folks git tu be angels er geese, which they're gittin, mighty nigh. Fust ye know, the' 'll come a war, kerslap, an' nob'dy ready 'mongst all the stuff we've got tu make sogers on, jest as good sogers as fit in the Revolution an' eighteen-hundred-an'-twelve. But I s'pose it don't take long tu larn tu kill folks, an' it's hopesin' we won't haf tu."

"Ah'll goin' tole you de trut', seh," said Antoine, who had been a curious and interested spectator; "it was mos' look wus as de Papineau war, on de Patrick side of it. De British he look pooty, honly he 'll gat too much gaun an' shoot it too much. He can leek more as honded tousan' you feller. Why, seh, he 'll leek me, mahsef."

Just relieved of his holiday coat and hat, Uncle Lisha sat sweating in his shirt sleeves when Sam entered his kitchen. Joseph Hill, who had come a mile from home to rest himself, lounged in an easy-chair.

"I seen one man tu-day," said Uncle Lisha, looking at Huldah, "'at looked julluk sech sojers as we hed tu Plattsburgh, an' the fust letters of his name is Samwill Lovel."

"I doan' know but what I'd jest abaout as lives train as not tu, an' abaout as lives not tu as tu," said Joseph, serenely unenvious of the compli-

ment that reddened Sam's cheek, "on'y it makes father swearin' mad 'cause I can't git the right foot forrid fust, which it's allers the left, he says, an' I don't see how on airth you're goin' tu, er-less ye take kinder of a half hitch, hipperty hop."

"Wal," said Uncle Lisha, "there's bubbly, an' the women folks, an' me an' Drive hain't got tu train, hev we, bubbly? Ah! see here, daddy's man, le' 's go fin' aout what's in Uncle Lisher's kut-tail pocket. It felt julluk a sugar plum a-tunkin' ag'in' the calf o' my laig all the way hum."

With the little boy holding on to his tan-stained forefinger with one dimpled fist and leading the sad-faced hound by the ear with the other, he went over to where the blue coat was hanging on the wall.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE END OF A JOURNEY.

THE uneventful summer passed, marking its almost imperceptible changes by the withering of one flower and the blooming of another; the growth of grain and grass, their ripening and cutting down, the slow stoop of fruitful branches under their increasing burden, the song and silence of birds, and the stealthy southward march of sunrise and sunset along the mountain crests. And lo, it was fall with no bloom but the golden-rod and asters, with the red flame of the sumac kindled in mimicry of bloom.

Bobolinks, swallows, and orioles were gone, and but now and then some remaining singer remembered or sang his summer song, and the crickets chirped with fainter monotony in the chill evenings.

The calls of migrant birds came out of the gloom from afar and near, and afar again while the listener wondered what they were. After a day portentous of storm, with gathering clouds and steadily increasing wind, there came a wild night.

Afar among the desolate mountain peaks, the wind roared with sullen, incessant anger, intermittently heard between the surging blasts that swooped upon the valley and drove the rain in a fierce, assaulting slant, with attending wraiths of flying seed.

The jaded horses of the mail wagon splashed wearily through the puddles whose agitated surfaces glittered dimly in the light of the mud bespattered lantern, and halted in front of the post office. A wind-tossed shout of the mail driver, and the thud and clank of the mail bag on the wet platform, at once brought forth the alert, bareheaded postmaster, to whom was vaguely revealed by the bolt of light shot through the open door a forlorn, bedraggled figure crouching beside the driver. Clapham strove to make it more distinct with a shading hand, but could not guess even at the sex of the muffled form until a wet ribbon fluttered and snapped about the head. Then the wagon moved on with its feeble light struggling through the storm and darkness.

"Jim's got him a passenger," he announced to the only visitor whom the arrival of the semi-weekly mail had yet tempted forth in such weather. "An' it's a womern. I can't e-magine," he pondered with hovering hands arrested over the fastenings of the mail bag and eyes staring into space, "what womern is a-traveling sech

a night. I'll bet a cent I know. It's that Meeker gal that's ben tu work in a fact'ry 'way daown in Massachusetts. Yis, sir, that's jest exactly who 't is ;" and chuckling over his sagacity he began to undo the straps, and his visitor, waiting for his paper, thought "like 'nough" as he lounged over to witness the always interesting operation.

The changes of the season were but dully noted by Pelatiah. He was sorry when the fishing days were ended, for they had brought him some consolation for a bereavement crueller than death, if not forgetfulness of his faithless sweatheart, the gleam of whose bright eyes flashed up at him from the evanescent bubbles, now mocking, now piteously pleading, and whose voice called to him, far and elusive, in the many voices of the woods. He had come to think without resentment of the girl who had won his heart but to rend it, remembering faults but to study apologies for them, and cherishing with fondest memory all that was best in her, the best, he was sure, that was possessed by any woman. Yes, she was dead to him, and he could never be fooled or happy again.

He found some solace in dogged, steady work, yet while his hands mechanically dug potatoes, husked corn, held the plough, or wielded the axe, his thoughts were continually straying back into the old wearisome paths.

The early fall had brought its ordinary sport. There had already been coon-hunting in the corn-fields, but the shouting rabble of men and boys, the yelping pack of dogs of all breeds, and the wild uproar of the closing scene when the dislodged coon fought to the last gasp against the relentless host of enemies, constituted sport little to his liking. There were plenty of squirrels barking and squalling in the nut-trees, and wild pigeons gleaning the grain fields; and partridges were well grown. That very afternoon, as he drove the cows up from the back side of the pasture and passed a clump of elder, the berry-laden tops were rent apart as by a sudden explosion, and half a dozen strong-winged birds burst forth and shot in long curves toward the woods.

Such sports seemed trivial, but better was at hand when in the frost-silvered dawn he and Sam would be afield waiting for Drive's whimpered prelude to burst into melody, signaling them to make all speed to their runways.

He was thinking of this as he moved uneasily about the kitchen, waiting for a lull in the wild weather that he might go up to Sam's and plan a fox hunt for the quiet day which was sure to follow the storm. Now he let in a rainy gust at the narrowly opened door, now he peered into the blankness through the beaten panes. He watched with dull interest the flickering lantern of the

mail wagon struggling against the wind and rain. With as little interest, though it reached out toward him in shivering reflections across the ruffled, rain-pelted pools of the road, he saw it stop at Clapham's to drop the mail bag that brought him no more letters.

He turned wearily away, and said to his mother: —

“ I b'lieve I 'll gwup tu Samwill's a spell ; ” and took his hat and coat from their peg.

“ Why, Peltier Gove,” she exclaimed, dropping her hands and the stocking she was darning into her lap together, while the ball of yarn fell unnoticed to become the plaything of the kitten. “ You 'll git soppin' wet an' ketch your death cold, an' it's darker 'n Egypt.”

“ It don't rain sca'cely a mite naow, an' I wanter see Samwill pertic'ler.”

His mother arose and went to him, laying a gentle hand on his arm as she said in a low, beseeching voice: —

“ You hain't a-goin' tu Hamner's, be ye, Peltier? ”

“ No, marm, I hain't. I don't go there no more,” he answered, with a decision that was convincing.

“ Anyb'dy 'at's got a ruff over 'em an' do' know 'nough tu stay 'n under it sech a night, ortu be put in the 'Sylum,” his father said, shut-

ting the stove hearth with a spiteful kick of his stockinged feet.

His sister, casting a scornful glance at him from her hem-stitching, said witheringly, "Lordy! I hope tu goodness, I shan't never git in love ef it's got tu make fools o' folks!"

Pelatiah looked reproachfully at her and went out, only saying to himself, "I hope tu the Lord you never will, Alviry."

More than a lack of sympathy and the impatience with his melancholy evinced by all the family save his mother, a desire to be out in the wildness of the night impelled him to go forth. The raging elements gave him something to fight against, and he felt a kind of purposeless heroism in breasting the fierce buffets of the wind and the pelting rain.

As he struggled forward toward the road, bending against the furious blasts, he ran against some one, and both were brought to a sudden stand.

"Ooogh," gasped a boyish voice. "Is that you, Peltier? I was a-comin' arter you. The' 's someb'dy tu Hamner's wants to see ye, right off. My! Ef you did n't skeer me!"

The words were whisked away by the wind, but not till Pelatiah had caught them all.

"Someb'dy wants tu see me tu Hamner's? Well, they won't, thet 's all! I hain't a-goin' nigh Hamner's fer nob'dy, Billy Wiggins."

"But ye got tu," the boy shouted up to him.
"They said you must, Hamner an' ol' Kezier."

"But I won't," persisted Pelatiah stoutly.
"Who is 't? That feller 'at buys fur?"

"No, I do' know who 'tis, but you got tu come. Both on 'em said so. It's life er death, they said, both on 'em, Kezier in partic'ler. I would n't go back alone fer one dollar!" and Billy clutched at Pelatiah's fluttering coat skirts and tugged toward the road.

A strange presentiment flashed upon Pelatiah's brain and his heart choked. Life or death! He remembered his promise to his mother and was ready to break it, and, taking the boy's hand in his, they went down the road, struggling against the surges of the wind.

Their way was less obscure when the lights of the stores and tavern fell across the ruts and puddles, quivering as if the feeble rays trembled in the wind. Beyond, the broader, ruddier glow of the forge banded the road, pulsing with every throb of the hammer, whose thundering beats were always heard, now rising above the lulls of gusty uproar, now dully accentuating the fiercer blasts.

"Haow come you daown tu the village sech a night?" Pelatiah asked suddenly.

"Why, hain't you heard? I've hired aout tu Hamner," Billy asked, resentful of such ignorance.

“ You hed n’t orter. ’Tain’t no place fer a boy, an’ your mother needs ye tu hum.”

“ She was willin’. An’ I c’n be airnin’ suthin’. She ’s got real tough, naow, an’ I go hum oncte a week an’ chop wood an’ tinker up.”

At Hamner’s they entered a dark passage through a side door and groped their way up a flight of stairs. Beaconed by the light shed through cracked and shrunken panels, they came to the poorest chamber in the tavern. Hamner had evidently shrewdly classified the quality of his guest. The door was opened by a bent old woman, who, after assuring herself of Pelatiah’s identity by a brief, keen glance, admitted him, but unceremoniously excluded Billy, to the disappointment of his boyish curiosity.

“ She ’pears tu be asleep naow,” the old woman whispered, peering over the candle that she shaded with her hand at the motionless form on the bed. “ She ’s a dreffle sick gal. Hamner was afeerd she was a-goin’ tu die right on his hands, an’ he hustled right off arter the darkter, an’ he come an’ gin her suthin’ that sot her tu sleep. I don’t b’lieve he thinks she ’s goin’ tu live, fer he did n’t say nothin’, only sythed arter he ’d pulted her, an’ ast tew three questions, an’ said her fowlks had orter be sent fer, an’ she said she did n’t want tu see nob’dy, on’y you.”

The old woman cautiously uncovered the candle

and let its light fall for a moment on the haggard, fevered face that lay among a confusion of tangled golden hair on the lank pillow. Pelatiah's presentiment was verified, and it was not the surprise of recognition that made him start, but the woeful change grief and despair and sickness had wrought in the face.

"Is she some o' your fowlks? I sh'd a'mos' thought yer mother 'd ha' come ef she was," the old woman whispered in a hoarse, monotonous buzz.

Pelatiah shook his head and she leered at him with a ghastly grin that revealed one yellow tooth, the sole survivor of the white rows that youthful smiles long ago disclosed. There was a terrible revelation in that wrinkled visage of the old age that a sinful life brings one to, and he was thankful it was in the power of death to forestall it.

"Ooh, yer gal, eh? Wal, Jake's goin' tu see the s'lec'men, er the poormaster, an' hev her took keer on."

Pelatiah started. "You go an' tell him the' hain't no need on't. I'll take keer on her. She hain't goin' tu be no taown charge!"

"I never hed no idee you was sech a lively young feller," said Keziah, leering at him with an admiration that filled him with disgust.

"Go quick! I'll stay with her."

He placed a chair softly beside the bed and sat

down, as the old woman left the room. The girl moaned, moved uneasily, and opened her eyes, looking wildlly about till they rested on Pelatiah, and then a look of gratitude lighted them.

“I was ’feared you would n’t come. I hed n’t no right to ask you, but I could n’t help it,” she said, in a thin, weak voice. “I hain’t got a friend on airth — not one, not one,” and her pit-eous voice broke with a sob before she answered his questioning, puzzled gaze. “No, he never married me. He went off an’ lef’ me. I must tell ye quick, fer it seems as though I was goin’ away somewheres, right off; an’ when I went hum my folks turned me aou’ door, an’ I went tu work aout, where they did n’t know me, an’ I took sick, an’ they would n’t keep me no longer, an’ I come here. It seemed as ’ough I’d got tu see ye once more, an’ tell ye I’m sorry I was so mean to ye. You can’t never forgive me, but I wish ’t you would n’t hate me.”

“I never hated ye one minute, Lowizy,” he spoke in a choked voice, and then, after a conscientious questioning of his heart, “an’ I du forgive ye. Mebby you’ve bore more’n I hev.”

“Thank ye, Pelatiah. Be ye willin’ tu take a holt o’ my hand?” she asked timidly, and for answer he clasped tenderly in his rough palm the thin, hot hand that was feebly stretched out to

him. She closed her eyes and sighed restfully, then, after a while, asked : —

“Why, it ain’t June, is it? Seems ’ough I heard the birds singin’ and smelt the young come-ups. It’s time I was a-goin’. Good-by, Peltier.” The feeble tension of the little hand relaxed in his, her last breath fluttered out upon his cheek, and the poor fickle heart grew still forever.

“Is she sleepin’ yit?” old Keziah whispered, entering on tip-toe and exhaling an odor of strong waters.

“You needn’t be afeered o’ wakin’ her no more,” Pelatiah answered solemnly.

“Good land o’ livin’!” she gasped in an awed voice. “You don’t say she’s dead?” and then, after assuring herself by a look and touch, “Poor little creetur! It’s turrible to be took so young.”

“I don’t b’lieve ’t is, not allers. Is Jake up? I wanter see him.” As he groped his way down the narrow stairs, it seemed as if years had passed since he climbed them.

The storm spent itself in the night, and the morning broke on a peaceful world. As peaceful under the white veil of the dread mystery into which she had passed after the storm of life was the face of the dead girl. It was as if she had gone forth into the unfathomed hereafter, as well assured of forgiveness there as here.

Attended by a few sympathizing friends, Pela-

tiah laid his dead, now wholly his, to rest in the shadow of the flaming sumacs in the old graveyard on the hillside. There was no service but the brief testimony of Joel Bartlett, who felt moved to say:—

“ Inasmuch as we hev ben told by One formerly that aour Heavenly Father does temper the wind tu the shorn lamb, I feel it bore in upon me that this poor leetle lamb, which may hev strayed fur f’m the flock, is gethered tu the fold by the Good Shepherd.”

Unseen by any but Pelatiah, Huldah covertly dropped a spray of pale asters into the open grave. As the careless clods began to fall with muffled thuds on the straw-covered coffin, the little company silently dispersed.

“ It kinder seems ’ough Peltier felt wus ’n the’ was any need o’ his feelin’, considerin’, but mebbby he don’t, I d’ know,” Joseph Hill remarked to Antoine as they lingered last at the graveyard gate.

“ If you ’ll seen dat gal w’en she was ’live an’ fat an’ jes’ good as anybody gal, you ’ll ant blem Peltiet fer cried.”

CHAPTER XXII.

A GATHERING CLOUD.

THE continual roar of the November wind on the mountains was at times overborne by the nearer uproar of blasts that swooped upon the valley, screeching through the withered herbage, clashing the naked branches and driving the fallen leaves in sudden scurries against the low window of the lean-to.

But if the outer world was cheerless the shop was cosy, and Uncle Lisha and Sam were enjoying its comfort over their pipes and the affairs of their absent friends. At times the draughty little stove ceased its fluttering monotone, as if holding its breath to listen to the conversation. Then it resumed its roar as if the subject was too trivial for its attention.

“Yes,” said Sam, “Peltier’s pooty sober, but he ’pears tu be kinder settled daown, an’ not narvous ner off in a dream as he was. Why he ’d hev spells last year ’at he ’d stan’ a-gawpin’ off int’ the air, at nothin’ anybody else could see, an’ let a fox go skippin’ by him wi’aout seein’ the critter ner takin’ no notice till Drive come on

his track an' looked wonderin' as if askin', 'Why in time did n't you shoot?' Oncte he let a silver gray go by him jest that way. That r'aly tried my patience, fer it seemed as if it would ha' cured a feller of most anythin' tu ha' shot that fox. Then ag'in, he'd be all in a whew, an' blaze away wi'aout takin' no sight at nothin'. But he's carm as a eight-day clock this fall, an' hain't let a fox go by yet, ner missed ary one."

"I cal'late he'll be all right when fishin' time comes raound ag'in," said Uncle Lisha, splashing an obdurate tap in the tub and then bending it back and forth with impatient jerks. "Good airth an' seas. I b'lieve that aire so'luther must ha' come off 'm an off ox, it's so dumbd cont'ry."

"It jes' as likel' he come off caow, prob'ly," said Antoine, catching the last remark as he entered the shop and took his favorite seat. "Ah'll have see caow was more wus fer do he'll man' to, as hoxens, jes' sem' as hwomans was," and he crowded the tobacco down in his pipe and drew his crossed legs closer under him.

"Hwomans was funny kan o' peoples, an' so was mans, prob'ly. Ah'll b'lieve more as half de tam de fun ant pay fer de troublesome fer get marry. Folkses had more good tam fer be hol' bachely an' hol' gal. Ah do' know if Peltiet ant lucky for ant gat marry, prob'ly."

"Sho, Ann Twine, you've took twicte as

much geniwine cômfort as ye would ef you 'd ben a-shoolin' 'raound julluk a lunsome garnder all yer days, an' so hev I, along wi' my ol' goose, an' so 's Sam, tew, a-hevin'. One tech o' that leetle goslin' o' hisen, a-snugglin' up tu him, is wuth more 'n ten year o' his ol' wil' goosin. Haint it, Samwill?"

Sam nodded a hearty affirmative. He could hear the slow rock of a cradle in the next room above the subdued voices of the old wife and the young, and the occasional responses of his father, who preferred the amiable converse of these two women to the babble of the men.

"The trouble is," Uncle Lisha went on, "folks gits merried tew young, 'fore they r'aly know what they want, an' bimeby wake up an' fin' they got what they don't want, an' then they jest set the' sharp aidges tow-ards one 'nother the hull endurin' time."

"It ant gat no diffrence," Antoine protested. "W'en Ah'll was marree, Ah'll was heighteen, an' Ursule was feefteen, an' we'll ant quarrly honly fer made up ag'in. Mebby some tam Ah'll had fer slap it leetly mite, but we'll be all raght pooty quick. Wal, seh, Onc' Lasha, der was hol' man an' hol' hwomans in Canada gat marree togedder w'en dey was hol' an' in t'ree day dey was set heat dinny, an' leetly maouse run on de haouse, an' hol' hwomans say, 'See dat

maouse.' Hol' mans say, 'It was rats,' an' hol' hwomans say, 'No, it was maouse.' 'Ah tol' you it was rats,' he'll said. 'Maouse,' she'll said, an' dey holler 'Rat,' 'Maouse,' an' get so mad he'll go 'way an' stay t'ree year. Den he'll come back, an' she'll was verree glad fer see it. 'It was too bad you'll go 'way so, jes' for leetly maouse.' 'Ant Ah'll tol' you it was rats?' he'll holler, and he'll go, an' never come some more. What you tink fer hol' folkses naow, Onc' Lisha?"

"Yis, the' 's ol' fools as well as young fools, an' it's hard tellin' which is the biggest. But I've hearn tell o' tew ol' critters 'at got sot aidgeways an' come aout better 'n you tell on. They'd lived together thirty year, but bimeby they fell aout, an' they'd mump raound all day 'thaout speakin', an' when it come night they'd turn the' backs tow-ards one other an' snore, an' purtend tu be asleep, each one wishin' 't t' other 'd speak, but nary one wouldn't fust. An' so it run on till one night in the fall o' the year they heered a turrible rumpus 'mongst the sheep in the yard, an' he ups an' dresses him an' goes aout. Arter quite a spell, an' he did n't come back, she slips on her gaownd an' shoes an' aout she goes tu see what's the matter ailded him, an' lo an' behol', he was clinched in with an almighty gret bear, the bear a-chawin' at him an' him a-huggin' as

hard as the bear tu keep him f'm gittin' his hind claws intu his in'ards, which is onpleasant, as I know. 'Go it, ol' man, go it, bear,' says she, 'it's the fust fight ever I see 'at I did n't keer which licked.'

"She stood lookin' on a leetle spell, with her fists on her hips, till she see the ol' man was a-gittin' tuckered, an' the bear a-hevin' the best on 't, an' then she up with a sled stake an' gin the bear a wollop on the head 't knocked him stiffer 'n a last, and then they hed a huggin' match over the carkis of the bear, an' lived together as folks ortu, tu the eend of the' days."

With a briefly admitted blast of the wind, Solon and Pelatiah entered the shop. After the usual comments on the weather had been exchanged Pelatiah asked, "Has any on ye seen them fellers 'at 's ben puttin' up tu Hamner's these tew three days?" All ears were pricked up, for it was a rare event for Hamner to have guests of such long standing.

"T'ree four day?" cried Antoine in interrogative incredulity; "what kan o' folks you 'll s'pose dey was put uppın so long for heat hees codfeesh an' cookhover pettetoe?"

"Why, no; I hain't heerd on 'em," Uncle Lisha confessed, listening attentively, though he made a show of attending to his work while he awaited an answer to the question, "Who be they, Pel-tier?"

“That ’s more ’n I c’n tell ye fer all I ’ve seen ’em more ’n oncte. One on ’em ’s a kinder starved lookin’, dreamin’ ol’ critter ’at wears specs an’ black clo’s, — wal, looks like a minister ’at ’s lost his sheep an’ hed n’t got so much as the tag-locks fer tendin’ on ’em afore he did lose ’em. An’ the’ ’s another feller ’at looks nigh abaout as hungry, but not so pious. Seems ’s ’ough I ’d seen him ’raoun’ afore a diggin’ gingshang rhut. But t’ other one ’s a all-fired cute lookin’ chap, look ’s if he lived off’m the top shelf ev’ry day an’ wears han’some clo’s off intu the woods an’ a goold chain tu his watch an’ don’t smoke nothin’ but seegars. I heard Hamner call him Colonel Ketchum.”

“Good airth an’ seas, ef he ’s ’raoun’, there ’s some speckerlatin’ goin’ on some’rs.”

“What seems tu be their ospensible ockerpation, that is, what be they duin’ on?”

“I hearn ’em tellin’ over tu the store ’at they ’re gee-ologists er haw-ologists er some sech ox-teamin’ name, an’ the leegislatur sent ’em aout tu see what kinder faoundations the state is sot on, tu know whether no it’s likely tu stan’. Some thinks that ’s only foolin’ an’ they ’re jest a party o’ counterfeitters, an’ some thinks they ’re a-spyin’ raoun’ arter runaway niggers ’at they ’spect Joel Bartlett’s got hid. They was up tu Joel’s purtendin’ tu s’arch the taown records, an’ some thinks they ’re on’y lookin’ fer a place tu hol’ camp-meetin’,

but ef they was, they wouldn't be a stayin' tu Hamner's, they 'd put up tu Elder Foote's. Anyways they 're pokin' raoun' in the woods wi' a hammer an' spade an' pick. It's cur'us, anyways."

"I guess they won't kerry no niggers aouten Danvis if they fin' 'em," said Sam, "but I p'sume likely they 're some speckerlatin' critters."

"Who knows but what they 're lookin' arter the ol' Injin lead mind 'at folks useter tell on," Uncle Lisha suggested. "They said the' was a ol' Injin useter come oncte a year an' go up ont' the maountain some 'eres an' git all the lead he could lug. They watched him an' follered him, but they could n't never find aout where he got it."

"I'll bet ye a dollar they 're huntin' fer aour money," Solon whispered nervously to Antoine. "Ef they be, I hope that ol' bear 'll oncaounter 'em;" and then added aloud, "It would n't s'prise me none ef they was accomplishes o' that aire Bascom, a-connivin' in his nufarious tricks."

"Why they hain't been a-nigh him as anybody knows on," said Pelatiah.

"Wal," Uncle Lisha said, applying himself more diligently to his work, "whatever they 're up tu, I don't s'pose they 'll du none on us no good. But what's this I hear 'em tellin' 'baout that aire Bascom goin' to marry Square Need-

ham's widder? She's rich, I s'pose. Got taller 'nough aouten the ol' ox tu buy her a steer."

"Ah'll guess he'll marree it if he'll could, prob'ly. What ail dat Bascoms? He'll borry money of ev'ree bodee, an' dey say dey can' anybody gat hees pay, honly promise, promise, nex' week, nex' week."

"I'm glad he's in the same fix I be," said the old man. "He hain't got none o' my money, ner I hain't nuther."

"An' dey say folks was hear loaded team goin' 'way from de store in de naght, an' dey t'ink he'll carry hees good."

"Sho! You don't say? Wal, I'm afeered he's a tough cud fer someb'dy to chaw, I r'aly be, an' a turrible nice-spoken, candid-appearin' feller he is, tew."

Sam arose, went to the door, and looked out into the gusty night, and retired to the kitchen. He bent for a long time over his boy sleeping in the cradle where Huldah, sitting sewing at the table corner, could jog it with her foot. Then he cast a troubled glance upon his wife and Aunt Jerusha at her knitting, and at his father nodding over the braided husks coiled in many convolutions about his legs and on the floor. Then he sat down in moody silence to whittle the morning's kindlings.

"You'll ant s'pose prob'ly Sam was lend it money, ant it?" Antoine whispered.

“Good airth an’ seas, no,” said Uncle Lisha, in a voice as guarded as its emphasis would allow. “Samwill hain’t no money tu lend, but he’s allers took onaccountable tu that aire Bascom, an’ he can’t abear tu hear a word ag’in’ him. There, that tarnal tap is on at last, an’ it’s hopesin’ it won’t make the man ’at wears it go the way he don’t want. It’s contr’y ’nough tu.”

He loosened his foot and the boot from the strap that held it to his lap, and, rising with a sigh of relief, began to untie his apron, a hint that hastened the departure of his guests.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DARK DAYS.

SAM's chores were done betimes next morning and his breakfast was hardly eaten, when he announced an abrupt departure by saying that he had an errand at the village.

"What be you in sech a tew for?" Huldah asked. "You hain't aout o' terbacker, I know, fer the' 's nigh a paper full in the sullerway, an' it hain't a week sence you got a paound o' paowder an' four paounds o' shot." She could think of no possible errands that demanded such immediate attention. She followed Sam to the door and laid a hand on his arm. "What is't Sam? The' 's suthin' a-pesterin' on ye, I know by your looks. Why don't you tell what 't is? Hain't your wife the one you 'd orter tell your troubles tu?"

"No man ever had a better one," he said earnestly. "It hain't nothin' much. Don't you cross no bridges till ye come tu 'em, Huldah," and he hurried away at as swift a pace as ever took him to a runaway, barring the exigencies that demanded running. He wished it was night that

he might run now, but it would not do, for every old woman on his route would sally forth to know if he was going for the doctor, and delay him with no end of questions.

When he entered Bascom's store, he was startled to see how bare it had become since he saw it last. Half the shelves were empty, and the tempting display of the counters had shrunk to a forlorn array of odds and ends. A sharp-eyed stranger was prowling softly about with a note-book and pencil in hand and Bascom was lounging near, in apparently careless attendance.

"Why, good morning, Lovel. Glad to see you. Mr. Whitney, Mr. Lovel. My friend Mr. Whitney is helping me take account of stock. Lovel's a particular friend of mine, Whitney. Greatest fox-hunter in the country."

Mr. Whitney nodded, looked suspiciously at Sam, and went on noting down his memoranda.

"Say, Lovel," Bascom continued hurriedly, "I want to go fox-hunting with you, or rabbit-hunting. That suits me better. What do you say to going some day next week?"

"I don't never hunt rabbits," Sam answered with a preoccupied air. "Break my dogs never tu foller 'em. I'd like tu see you a minute, Mr. Bascom."

"Certainly, certainly, step this way. Well then call it foxes, though I never could kill a fox!

I ain't sharp enough for them ;" and he led the way to the dingy little counting-room whither the lynx eyes of Whitney followed them till the door closed upon them.

"What can I do for you, Lovel?" Bascom asked with solicitous good humor.

"Look a here, Mr. Bascom," said Sam in a low, restrained voice and dashing at his subject as a bashful man does when he dare not hesitate. "I want you tu gi' me some s'curity fer what I've signed wi' ye, on them bank notes. It's run up tu nine hundred dollars an' up'ards, an' ef anything should happen, it 'ould knock me gally west."

"Why, certainly, Lovel, I'll be glad to secure you. What do you say to a lien on the stock in the store?"

"Why, seem's 'ough it looks kinder slim," Sam said doubtfully.

"Well, perhaps; I've had a big trade lately, but it's worth a good deal more 'n nine hundred. I shall be getting in my winter's stock next week, though, an' I can fix you then, so you'll feel easy enough."

Sam shook his head. "I guess I'll take a lien on what you've got, an' you e'n give me another, when you git your new goods in."

"All right, Lovel. I'll attend to it right off, to-morrow." Sam's countenance fell. "You see

I can't attend to it to-day, on account of helping Whitney. To-morrow will do just as well, won't it, Lovel?"

"I'd a good deal druther hev it made aout to-day."

"Then, again," continued Bascom, "the town clerk and the 'Square have both gone to V'gennes. Went by early this morning, an' we could n't get the papers made out."

"Wal, I s'pose I'll hafter wait," said Sam, turning to go. "You don't blame me none, Mr. Bascom? I hain't got nothin' but the farm an' a wood-lot an' the stock an' the 's three ol' folks dependin' on me, an' it 'ould be awf'l tough if anything should happen."

"Why of course, but you need n't be uneasy. But say, if you are," and he sank his voice to a whisper, "why don't you deed the farm back to your father?"

"No, sir," and Sam's face flushed; "I hain't no slink ef I be a dumb fool."

"Oh, there's no harm in your doing that if it would make you feel any easier. That's all it would be for, anyway. But do as you like. Come down in the morning and we'll fix the lien."

He followed Sam to the outer door and looked after him with something of concern in his restless eyes; then saying to himself, "If he will be a

blasted fool, he must take his chances with the rest," he returned to his uneasy lounging.

That night he was speeding behind Hamner's best horse, toward the lake, on his way to Canada, a fugitive from Danvis, where he was never seen again.

On his way to the village, the next morning, Sam was met by the ill tidings already running like wild fire along the quiet roads, that Bascom's store was closed, everything in it attached by distant creditors, and he gone, no one knew whither. Sam went on to receive complete assurance of the rumor, and then returned to his home, bearing the burden of a heavy heart. His white, set face frightened Huldah when he entered the kitchen.

"Be you sick?" she asked anxiously, but he did not answer till she had followed him into the bedroom. Then seating himself on the bed, he drew her to his knee and with desperate rapidity told her the whole story of his wretched entanglement with the unscrupulous adventurer. She listened to the end without speaking, and then, holding his face with both hands close to hers, she said:—

"Sam, why did n't you tell me afore? I don't blame you fer nothin' but that. You hed orter ha' tol' me, an' mebbly I would n't ha' let ye, fer I allers mistrusted that Bascom. He was tew clever an' tew false-eyed."

“Yis,” said Sam, “tew dumb clever an’ cute fer sech a dodunk as I be. He kep’ me a-thinkin’ it ’ould be all right, tu-morrer, tu-morrer, wi’ his promises. On’y yistiddy he promised faithful, tu gi’ me s’curity, an’ naow all he hed is ’taiched up an’ he gone an’ lef’ me tu face the music alone. Ev’yt’ing we’ve got is jes’ the same as gone. Them bank fellers tu V’gennes don’t show no marcy.”

“Mebby father’ll help us, so ’s ’t we c’n save the farm,” said Huldah.

“I would n’t ask him, no more’n I’d cut my head off. He never thought none tew much on me, an’ naow he’ll think less on me. He’ll tell you tu come hum wi’ bub, an’ le’ me go tu the ol’ Scratch.”

“No, Sam, he knows I would n’t never leave you jes’ as well as you du,” said Huldah fervently, stroking his frowsy, flaxen poll. “We’re young an’ tough, an’ we’ve got one ’nother an’ aour boy, an’ what’s the hul worl’ compared? Don’t you be daown-hearted.”

“I know it all. But what hits me the hardest is, what’s goin’ tu be become o’ father an’ Uncle Lisher an’ Aunt Jerushy. They’re all on ’em mos’ past cuttin’ the’ own fodder. An’ what ef we sh’ld be sick er suthin’? The’ ’d be nothin’ fer ’em but tu go on the taown. It’s like a chunk o’ lead.”

"They shan't never," she said, with suppressed vehemence; "we'll work aour fingers tu the bone fust. But there'll be a way aout somewheres. It's took us sudden, an' we've got tu think."

"I've tried tu, but my head's all in a whirl, an' my idees is all in a whew, like dried leaves in a whirlwin'."

"Well, we'll think it aout someways," said Huldah hopefully.

"The sheriff'll be here tu rights," said Sam, "fer them bank fellers is sharper on the scent of a dollar 'an Drive on the track of a fresh-started fox. I'd ruther take a wus lickin' 'an ever I got yit 'an tu see him a-levyin' on the stuff, an' the lan' that gran'ther cleared on the fust pitch 'at was made in Danvis. He could ha' settled at the lake ef he hed n't ben so afeared o' the fever 'n' aig. Mebby ef he hed, an' I'd ha' been raised there, I should n't ha' ben such a tarnal fool. But then ag'in, mebby I would n't ha' faound you. Anyhaow, the sheriff can't take you an' bub away f'm me. Wal, I s'pose I mus' go tu work ef it is lunsome business, a-duin' fer you do' know who. But it's better 'n mumpin'. Duin' anythin' is. But, fust off, I've got tu tell father an' Uncle Lisher, an' it's abaout the toughest job in the hull business."

"Wal, an' I'll talk it over wi' Aunt Jerushy."

"What a caoward I be!" Sam exclaimed.

“Lord, I wish ’t I c’ld run off int’ the woods an’ hide, er lay daown an’ sleep an’ never wake up tu remember nothin’.”

“Oh no, you don’t nuther! You wanter live an’ see what kin’ of a hunter the baby ’s goin’ tu be,” said his wife.

At length, facing the irksome duty of inflicting pain, Sam called his father into the shop, and, in the fewest possible words, unsparing of self-condemnation as a penitent of his own scourge, he told the ill tidings to the two old men. Uncle Lisha heard them with an attention divided by his work after the first few words, listening, while he entered the bristles in the awl-holes with untrembling hands, and drew the waxed ends with slow, strong pulls. When Sam concluded, he said : —

“Wal, good airth an’ seas! The’ hain’t no use o’ cryin’ over spilt milk. I guess the’ won’t none on us die afore aour time comes.”

Timothy Lovel, although appalled by the calamity which threatened to break up the household wherein he had found such quiet contentment, offered only the mild reproof : —

“You wa’n’t ezackly preudent a-signin’ wi’ a man you did n’t know no better,” which he tempered by saying, “but you meant well, an’ hed n’t no idee but what ’t would come all right.”

Sam waited a little, giving them opportunity to

say more, but they did not avail themselves of it, and for the ease of his mind he went forth to find some work to lay his hand to. His first look abroad revealed the well-known figure of the constable rocking and swaying up the road in his thorough-brace sulky, a species of carriage used by no other person in the community save by the doctor.

The officer hitched his well-known white horse much too conspicuously in front of the house, and then began to levy on the personal property in a disagreeably calm and business-like manner. Sam had always liked Constable Beers, and had voted for him at every March meeting for years, but he hated him now, and swore never to give him his vote again. He, however, relented when the constable, having made the rounds, turned to him and said with a sigh of regret:—

“Darn it all, Lovel! the’ hain’t pus’nal prop’ty ’nough tu half satisfy the claim, an’ I’ve got tu ’tach the land. I’m tormented sorry, but I’ve got tu du my duty. You must n’t lay up no hard feelin’s ag’in’ me, as ’twixt man an’ man.”

“I did n’t know but—you lufted tu, same as butchers lufster kill critters,” said Sam. “They hain’t nothin’ ag’in’ the critters, but they like the business.”

“Wal, then, I don’t,” said the constable; and then, in a loud whisper, though no one was in

earshot, "why, if you had any idee this was a-comin', why in tunket did n't you deed the lan' back tu yer father?"

"Proberbly, 'cordin' tu most folkses' idee, 'cause I was a dumbd fool."

CHAPTER XXIV.

FRIENDS IN ADVERSITY.

SAM wandered uneasily about in pursuit of work that had no purpose but to keep him from thinking. At last, he shouldered the ox-yoke and started for the meadow. As he passed the hog-pen, he fairly resented the indifference with which the hogs were taking on fat for another man's benefit, and begrudgingly threw them their accustomed largess of nubbins, though they grunted lazy recognition of his familiar footstep. It put him more out of humor, to see the contentment with which the cows and oxen grazed, jowl deep in the aftermath, and the sheep nibbling the pasture knolls, all indifferent to impending change of ownership, though they had so long been his daily companions. The old hound alone seemed sympathetic, walking at heel, spiritless and dejected, scarcely noticing the last night's fox-trail that the reeking herbage still exhaled, and meeting his occasional glances with a wistful face more troubled than his master's.

The mood of nature was as little in accord with his as was that of his flock and herds. The

sun shone out of the soft sky with genial warmth on woods and fields not yet quite stripped of painted leaves and green grass by the final desolating blasts of late autumn. There was a full measure of hearty cheer in the notes of migrant crows and other birds that delayed departure or stayed to brave the stress of winter weather; only the tri-syllabic plaint of the thistle bird, gleaning the ripe weed seeds, had a cadence of sadness and farewell.

"It's all the same tu the airth an' the dumb critters, who goes or who comes! All but you, Drive," he said as he slipped the ox-bow on old Bright's burly neck and fastened it in the yoke and called Broad to take his place. "But I hope whoever gits a holt o' you ol' fellers 'll be good tu ye, an' the caows an' the ol' mare. I don't want you 'bused ner the farm nuther."

He yoked the oxen to the cart and drove them out to the field for the last shocks of unhusked corn. The plough stood in an unfinished furrow among the stubble and frost-blackened pumpkin vines. Sam drew it out and heaved it upon the cart with spiteful energy.

"By the gret horn spoon, I won't plough another furrer fer the Lord knows who," he soliloquized in a tone that accorded with the action; and with a long look, as if bidding the familiar field farewell, he hauled home the last load and turned the oxen loose.

He watched them wander off in search of the choicest feed and then set himself to husking, while his vagrant thoughts wandered in futile quest of a way of escape from the troubles that beset him. His eyes went over and over the familiar interior. It was hard to think that the old barn was passing out of his ownership. Every nook and corner of scaffold, bay, and stable recalled some incident of childish sport or freak of fancy, linked with the thoughts of youth and manhood so intimately that their years seemed but as days, childhood and youth but parts of dawning manhood. The rudely carved initials and figures were translated again in their old significance; the scars, the knots, the contortions of grain took on again the semblance of men, beasts, and birds, that had been realities to his childish imagination. All the familiar surroundings seemed too much a part of himself to go out of his life while he yet lived.

"Consarn it!" he cried out impatiently, as he tossed aside a bundle of stalks, "my idees runs wilder 'n a haoun' pup on a back track, an' never gits nowheres. I'll tell ye what, ol' dawg," addressing the hound curled up in the comfortable warmth of the sunshine falling on the barn floor, "we'll go off int' the woods a day, jest you an' me, an' see if we can't git 'em straightened aout."

Drive's tail beat a rustling response on the

cornstalks, and his sad brow was lifted in new corrugations of inquiry.

The shadow of a figure debased the gold of the floating motes and crept along the floor till it fell upon the bundle rustling on Sam's lap, and Pelatiah's lank figure materialized behind it. Drive wagged recognition, and Sam turned a surprised face over his shoulder to welcome their comrade.

The simple greetings, "Why, Peltier," "Wal, Samwill," expressed a deal of friendliness, but no more was said till Pelatiah, after the custom of such visitors, seated himself, drew a bundle of corn across his knee, and began husking. For a while there was a continuous rustling of husks, leaves, and stalks, punctuated by the snapping off of ears and their sharp click upon the growing pile; then, as the two huskers finished their bundles together, Pelatiah said, after much embarrassed clearing of his throat:—

"I s'pose it's true what I hearn abaout that aire Bascom's gittin' you intu sech a mess?"

Sam nodded assent, and Pelatiah continued, "I'm turrible sorry, Samwill, an' I wish 't I hed the means tu help ye more 'n what I hev; but I hev got some, which I want you tu take an' use it."

He leaned far back, straightened his left leg, went down into the depths of his trousers' pocket, and brought up therefrom a wallet, from which

he took a small roll of bank notes, and carefully counted them upon his knee with a frequently moistened forefinger.

“ I hed consid’able more ’n forty dollars ’at I ’d saved up one way an’ ’nother,” he said apologetically, as he completed the counting, “ but the fun’al, an’ the darkter’s bill an’ Hamner’s took above half on ’t. But I want ye tu take this an’ not trouble tu pay it back ontill things eases up on ye.”

He stretched it out toward Sam with an awkward, bashful eagerness glowing in his honest face.

“ Oh, Peltier, I could n’t ! ” Sam protested, his voice choking and his eyes moistening. “ I ’m a thaousan’ times obleeged tu ye, but I could n’t take it.”

“ But I want ye tu, Samwill. ’T ain’t much, I know, but it ’ll help over the pitches some, maybe,” Pelatiah urged.

“ I ’m as ’bleeged tu ye as if ’t was a thaousan’ dollars, but I could n’t take it. I do’ know when I c’ld pay you, an’ I hain’t a thing tu s’cure you, an’ ev’rythin’ here ’s ’taiched up.”

“ I don’t care when you pay me, I want you tu take it an’ use it jest ’s if ’t was yourn.” Pelatiah thrust the money further toward Sam’s withdrawn hand. “ I did n’t s’pose you ’d spleen ag’in’ takin’ a leetle favor f’m me, Samwill, sen’ I ’ve

took so many f'm you," Pelatiah said, in a grieved tone, and still holding out the proffered loan.

Sam looked steadily into the earnest, kindly blue eyes and took the hand and money in a warm, firm grasp.

"Ef you 're goin' tu feel that way 'baout it, I shall hafter take it, but I hed n't ortu."

"You hed n't ortu? You 've gottu," said Pelatiah joyfully. "It 'ould burn my pocket tu kerry it an' you a-needin' on 't, so there!"

"Wal, ef you will hev it so, you will, but you got to take a note 't any rate. Come int' the haouse an' I 'll write one."

Pelatiah protested, but Sam was inexorable, and, after counting the money carefully, pocketed it and led the way into the house.

"Bad luck is good luck when it shows a feller who his frien's is," Sam said, laying a gentle hand on his young comrade's shoulder as they entered the door.

Long before the constable posted the notice of the sale in Hamner's bar-room and in Clapham's store, the news of Sam's disaster was spread through half the township.

Mrs. Purington waddled across the fields to offer the balm of condolence to the distressed family. The sound of her labored breath, and ponderous step on the threshold as she assisted herself, with a hand on her knee, to surmount it

and enter the door, opened to the Indian summer warmth, was the first announcement of her visit.

Faintly acknowledging the salutations of her daughter, Aunt Jerusha, Uncle Lisha, and Timothy, she slowly lowered herself into the first comfortable chair, accomplishing the feat with a final bounce, and exhaling a long sigh, as if she were a slowly collapsing bag of inflated india rubber. Then she rummaged forth her handkerchief and bottle of hartshorn salts, and fixed a tearful gaze on the little boy, who sat among his abandoned playthings staring in bewilderment at his grandmother's rueful countenance.

"Oh, you poor innercent!" she wailed, in a shaking voice, portentous of a lachrymal shower; "little you know what 's afore you, a-settin' there, playin' wi' your mother's clo'spins which I gin her four dozen, when she went tu haousekeepin' wi' yer father, which I should n't think he c'd endure tu look at ye ner her, a-thinkin' what he's brung on ye. Play wi' 'em while ye can, an' it don't make no diff'unce ef ye break 'em or lose 'em, fer 't ain't likely she'll hev no use fer 'em, wi' nothin' tu heng aout on'y the clo's on yer backs, which she can't 'thout all a-goin' tu bed. An' tu think 'at you was fetched through the whoopin' cough an' the measles wi' Hive surrup an' lobeles an' pennyroyal tea, tu come tu this, which I gathered wi' my own han's, an' nanny-

berries tu fetch 'em aout, a-nussin' you an' comfortin' your mother, an' broke o' my res', which I will continner tu, whilst I'm gi'n stren'th."

She put her handkerchief to her eyes and tucked the smelling-bottle inside it to her nose, making her snuffling sobs do double duty, while the object of her pity lifted up his voice and wept, whereunto Drive joined a sympathetic howl.

"For massy's sake, mother," cried Huldah, snatching up the child and wiping his nubby nose with her apron while she tried to comfort him, "what be ye makin' sech a fuss abaout? There, mother's man, he stop a minute an' hear Drive sing. Just see what a howdalo you've started! What's the use o' hevin' a fun'al afore anybody's dead?"

"It's allers the way," whined Mrs. Purington behind her handkerchief. "Jes' as soon as ye try tu comfort anybody, they git mad 'stiddy bein' grateful one mossel tu folks a-toilin' 'cross lots tu console 'em, an' climbin' fences an' a-soz-zlin' through wet grass, — I do' know why that aire rowen hain't cut, a ton to the acre, — an' the' heart a-bustin' wi' sympathy, an' both feet a-soppin' wet, an' then hev it all took so ongrateful. An' Lisher an' Jerushy," making a blind gesture toward them with the smelling-bottle frugally stopped with her forefinger, "the' hain't nothin' fer them but tu be hove ontu the taown, fer 's I see."

“ Good airth an’ seas, Eunice Pur’n’t’n ! Ef it comes tu thet, ’t ain’t no killin’ disgrace. Poverty hain’t no crime, an’ I’ve allers paid my sheer o’ the poor tax ; an’ ef it’s my lot tu hev some on’t used fer me, I shan’t consider it no disgrace. But the’ ’s lots o’ day’s works in me an’ the ol’ woman yit, afore it comes tu that.”

“ It does seem ’s ef some folks hed n’t no shame intu ’em,” she said mournfully, and Sam, entering just then, drew upon himself the consolatory stream.

“ Oh dear me sussy day ! ” she said, regarding him sorrowfully and reproachfully as she sniffed the hartshorn. “ I du hope, Samwill Lovel, ’at you reurlize naow what I allers said, an’ Huldys father, what yer goo’-fer-nothin’ huntin’ ’ould come tu in the eend. Huntin’ an’ signin’ goes hand in hand. Oh dear me suz ! ”

“ Wal, naow,” Sam said, in a conciliatory tone, “ I don’t ezackly see what my huntin’ hed tu du wi’ my signin’ wi’ that skeezucks. He never went a-huntin’ ’long wi’ me. Ef I was borned a tarnal fool, I do’ know what the huntin’, ’at come arter, hed tu du with ’t. Huntin’ sharpens a feller’s wits, an’ I’m ’most afeared I hain’t hunted half enough.”

She groaned, and went on : —

“ Haow in the livin’ worl’ anybody c’ld trust that sof’-soapin’ hippercrite of a Bascom ’s more ’n

I c'n see intu. I allers said f'm the fust 'at he was a scallywag, an' wa'n't tu be trusted a inch. He went off a-owin' me, myself, tew dollars, — twenty dozen aigs the' was, an' forty cents, 'cause I could n't think o' nothin' I wanted jes' then, never mistrustin' nothin'."

"You must ha' ben a-huntin' that day, mother," Sam suggested.

"Me a-huntin'?" she snorted indignantly. "Nob'dy never come tu no good a-shoolin' an' a-traipsin' 'raoun' a-huntin', an' —"

"'T aint no sech a thing, Eunice Bord'n." With the hoarse whistling voice came the sound of a footfall and the emphatic planting of a staff on the threshold, and Gran'ther Hill stamped in, glaring savagely at Mrs. Purington, who at once took refuge in her handkerchief and fortified herself with repeated sniffs of the hartshorn.

"It's good fer a man's body an' soul tu go a-huntin' ef he don't hunt like a cussed hawg, a-gawmin' daown ev'ything he comes tu. A rest tu the body an' a divarsion tu the min' fer sech as c'n enj'y sensible divarsion an' hain't got a appetite fer fun'als which I hain't. Would n't never go tu my own 'f I c'ld git red on 't."

The good woman uncovered one eye as this indirect thrust was delivered at one of her well-known weaknesses.

"The' can't nob'dy say 'at ever I went tu a

fun'al on'y f'm a sense o' duty, aouten respect tu the diseased an' tu comfort the livin'," she protested in broken accents. "But I declare tu goodness, Capting Hill, I won't never go nigh yourn."

"It's hopesin' I won' give ye no 'casion fer a c'nsid'able spell yit, Eunice," said the veteran, smiling grimly. "But I did n't come here tu jaw wi' women. I come here on business wi' Samwill," and he turned toward him without the softening of a line in his stern old visage.

"Hunters is some like sojers in hengin' together, an' I heng tu you, not 'at you 're much of a hunter, but ye would ha' ben ef I'd hed the bringin' on ye up, but you hain't tu blame for thet. I've jest hearn 'at you've got yer foot in-tu a reg'lar bear-trap thet blasted Bascom sot fer ye. Thet comes o' bein' tew tarnal clever an' good-natered, which it is the on'y fault o' hunters, an' what allers ailded me. The idee is, naow, tu git ye aout on 't, an' I come over tu tell ye 'at I've jest drawed my year's pension, namely, ninety-six dollars, in money, an' I'm a-goin' tu let ye hev it long as you're a min' tu, 'thaout use, twenty year mebbby, I shan't want it till I git kin'e ol 'an' gi'n aout."

The while he spoke, Gran'ther Hill drew from his pocket a tanned heart case and took out of it a roll of crisp new bank notes which he now began

to count out on the table, and, having laboriously completed the unusual task, shoved them toward Sam.

"I thank ye more 'n I c'n tell, Cap'n Hill," Sam said, "but I can't take it. I can't give ye no s'curity, an' my note hain't wuth the paper it's wrote on, naow. I could n't take it, Cap'n."

"Damn the s'curity. Gimme your dawg. I sh'd like tu own a ninety-six dollar haoun' dawg. Come, ye got tu take it, Sammy."

Sam shook his head. "No, Cap'n, I can't take it naow, but I'll tell ye what I'll du, if wust comes tu wust, I'll ask ye for 't, an' I 'm as 'bleeged tu ye as ef I hed the money in my pocket," and he thrust the notes back into the veteran's unwilling hand.

"Wal, ef ye won't hev it no other way, so be it," he said returning it to the heart case and that to his pocket.

"I don't see no way," whimpered Mrs. Purington, having regained her speech and improving the first opportunity to exercise it, "no way but fer you, Hully, tu take bub an' come hum till things gits settled. The 'll be the vandue, which the hull haouse 'll be run over wuss'n a donation party, thank goodness, they won't hafter be fed, sheriff's vandue, a-peekin' intu all the charmbers, an' a-trackin' f'm suller tu garrit, fer there 'll be mud, the' allers is, an' a-seein' your vallerdest

things sol' afore your face an' eyes fer mos' nothin'. You take bub an' come hum."

"Mother," — Huldah's voice was tremulous with suppressed indignation and her face flushed with anger, — "what sort of a fair-weather wife du you s'pose I be, tu sneak off an' leave my man tu stan' the brunt on 't alone? It was fer richer an' poorer 'at I promised tu take Sam, an' what I promise I stan' tu, jes' as he does. What hits one, hits both, an' the heft one kerries, t' other takes the' sheer on."

"I do' know Huldah but you'd better," said Sam. "It 'll be almighty onpleasant fer ye here, as yer mother says."

"I've gone snucks wi' you in all the pleasant things we've come tu, an' so I shall in them that hain't." She tossed the boy upon her shoulder and took him to his father, into whose arms she thrust him, where, clinging to Sam's neck he cast furtive wondering backward glances at his grandmother's woe-begone face and the grim visage of Gran'ther Hill.

"Bub hain't a-goin' tu leave his daddy in the ruts, is he, ner his mother, nuther?" she said, kissing his plump cheek.

"Naow, then, Sammy," said Gran'ther Hill, starting in his chair with a sudden recollection, "if you've got any cider 'at's good fer the time o' year as it was this time las' year, I want some

on 't, fer I 'm nigh abaout kiln-dried wi' talkin' an' hearin' talk. Light a light an' I'll go ri' daown suller wi' ye, fer Lisher an' Timerthy don't need none, 't aint nourishin' 'nough fer sech ol' critters. Why, they 've gone."

His eyes sought the corner where they had last been seen, but they, having received all they desired of Mrs. Purington's consolation, had some time before retired unnoticed to the shop.

As Gran'ther Hill carefully descended the stairs behind Sam, placing each foot twice on every step, he ground his gums till nose and chin met and whispered hoarsely : —

"By the Lord Harry, Lovel, I'll give ye the ninety-six dollars aout an' aout, if you 'll jest le' me choke that mother-in-law o' yourn, one minute."

CHAPTER XXV.

LUCK OF THE WOODS.

“THEY say the Widder Needham wants tu let her place on sheers,” said Sam to his wife the next morning, when they, the baby, and the hound were the only occupants of the kitchen, “an’ I’ve thought o’ tryin’ fer that, but I do’ know, I can’t git a holt o’ nothin’. I b’lieve I shall hafter go off int’ the woods by myself a spell,” and he cast a casual glance up at his gun that was gathering the dust of disuse. “Then ag’in, I kinder want tu look over aour maountain lot. That hain’t ben ’taiched, an’ it seems ’s ’ough it might be turned tu some accaount. The’ ’s a slew o’ timber on’t, an’ I c’ld build us a turrible neat lawg haouse aouten them spreuce.”

“Oh, I allers thought a lawg haouse wus jest as cute as could be an’ allers wanted tu live in one,” Huldah said with enthusiasm.

“Mebby you’ll git the ’chance. An’ if I c’ld hit the forge folks on a coalin’ job, I might make well on ’t. If ’t was cleared up, I s’pose we might git a livin’ off on ’t. It’s c’nsid’able uphill an’ I don’t s’pose the sile o’ land is fust chop, but I

guess it 'ould raise white beans an' buckwheat an' both on 'em is fillin'."

"Good land, Sam," cried Huldah. "Don't fer lan's sake say buckwheat afore mother. She'd hev a conniption fit an' hev aour ears all cracked off 'm aour heads afore the buckwheat was in blow."

"I don't set no gret store by it myself," Sam conceded, "but it's better 'n a snow bank, an' high duck folks is gittin' tu think buckwheat pancakes is some punkins. But the' can't no Green Maountain Boy go ag'in' beans. They was victuals an' drink tu the ol' settlers, an' ammernition, tew, fer I've heard Gran'ther Hill tell haow 'at they shot Yorkers with 'em. I guess I'll go up an' look the lot over an' see. An' I s'pose I might as well take my gun along an' Drive 'ould feel bad if I left him."

"No, you mus' n't hurt Drive's feelin's," said Huldah, smiling, as she roused the hound from the heavy sleep that linked one hunting bout with another.

"I allers feel better in the woods an' c'n think better in 'em, an' mebbby c'n git my idees straightened aout."

Huldah had great faith in Sam's sovereign balm for all his ills of body and mind, having seen it work cures of both, and offered no objection to a trial of it now. As he stepped forward to

take down his gun, his father came in with some husks in a basket, to sort for braiding. With surprise but no reproach, he said : —

“ Why, Sammy, seem ’s ’ough you was takin’ a late start a-huntin’, fer you.”

“ Wal, father, I’m goin’ more tu see abaout the wood lot. Seems ’s ’ough we c’ld git somethin’ aout o’ that,” Sam explained and went out, Drive careering about him in clumsy expression of joy at the unexpected outing. Sam’s heart felt a fresh pang as he passed the shop window and thought of the anxiety his credulity had brought upon his two old friends.

As Huldah fondly watched her husband out of sight, she sighed to see how wearily he walked with downcast eyes as one whose thoughts were far from sport or pastime. Yet his dulled senses were alert enough to feel keenly how his mood was mocked by the Indian Summer day that seemed to have caught all the year’s serenity in its misty web of gold and purple.

The breeze touched him softly as the breath of June, nor scarcely stirred the drifted windrows of fallen leaves, nor tossed alee the gray ashes of the goldenrod’s burned-out flame, nor bore from the veiled mountain the low song of the evergreens. The tranquil babble of unswollen brooks rose and fell with the light wafts, the bluebirds’ carol floated down through the haze that was spun from

sky to earth, the meadow-larks sang their long-drawn summer songs again, the lazy caw of lingering crows came from their latest woodland camp among the evergreens, and a partridge's April drum-call throbbed through the filmy copses. It was as if nature were solacing herself in this autumnal truce for all turbulence of her forces, past, or henceforth possible.

With scarcely a thought of his course, Sam entered the woods and heard as in a dream the old hound's rustling footsteps as he ranged about him. Nor did he scarcely notice more the impatient whine that told of a puzzling scent, half exhaled since Reynard fared homeward from his early mousing, nor yet the first clear note that announced a more exhilarating savor with assured direction. But when the melody became exultant and continuous with competing echoes he awoke to a realization that the fox was afoot, and he instinctively made for a favorite runway:

It was at the crest of a ledge that wrinkled the mountain side lengthwise, where the starved trees, beggarly with patches of lichen and rags of moss, stood far apart among the rocks and gave eye and gun a range of several rods. Sam stood listening till the hound's voice, with its attendant clamor of screaming jays, had faded out of hearing, leaving the woods about him as silent as if he were their only tenant.

He sat down on a fallen trunk and his thoughts went wearily back to a confused consideration of plans for the future that came and went like a procession of fog wreaths and would take no more definite form.

The bugle notes rose faintly again in the distance, and rolled nearer and nearer, but if heard, were not heeded, till a sudden burst close at hand recalled with a start his wandering thoughts, and he rose quickly to his feet. There was a rustling of dry leaves in the hollow at his left, and he caught fleeting glimpses of the fox running at top speed in evident alarm at a sight or scent of the hunter. With one motion, the cocked gun was at Sam's shoulder, sighted a foot ahead of the flying target and the trigger pulled. In that moment, his mind all on the game now, with a pang of vexation he was aware that a tree trunk had intervened. He heaved a sigh of disappointment.

"By the gret horn spoon, jewed by a skeezucks and fooled by a fox, I wonder what's a-comin' next."

The report of the gun led Drive to the spot, by a shorter route than the devious course of the fox. The hound looked up with reproachful, wondering inquiry a moment when laid on the trail, then resumed his slow, persistent pursuit with a renewed burst of far-echoed melody. Sam listened in vexation of spirit to the receding notes

of the hound and the answering echoes growing fainter and fainter, till they were scarcely distinguishable above the fitful stir of dry leaves in the vagrant wafts of air, and the constant monotone of the evergreens on the wind-loved heights.

At last they faded beyond the scope of intentest listening, and, dismissing with them all thought of sport, he went on over ledges and through depressions toward the mountain lot. His woodsman's eye soon discovered the faint marks of one boundary which he traced to an ancient corner-tree, encircled by its axe-scarred "witnesses" and bearing the moss-grown initials of the colonial surveyor and the numbers of the four lots whose common corner it had established, when Governor Benning Wentworth held disputed sway over the New Hampshire grants. Thence he carefully followed the eastern line through the forest whose autumnal silence was as unbroken as the dead stillness of winter, save for the occasional rustle of fallen leaves and the liquid tinkle of a rivulet ringing its course with a chime of foam bells.

The iterant clamor of a log-cock on his accustomed beat, the patient tapping of his lesser brethren, a squirrel's rasping of a nut, the petulant squalling of the jays, were sounds common to both seasons, but as Sam, with the habitual caution of a hunter, went noiselessly onward, he

became aware of sounds that seemed strange and at variance with these.

It was the noise of delving with spade and pick in stony soil. He moved cautiously in its direction till he came to the brink of ledge overlooking a level plateau or terrace, whereon he saw, almost beneath him, three men whom he at once recognized from Pelatiah's description as Hamner's mysterious guests. The one who was steadily wielding a pick he recognized as a trapper and root-digger from a neighboring town.

The ministerial looking gentleman in seedy black clothes was carefully examining the upturned earth and stones. The third, who was evidently first in the order of their worldly standing, was intently watching the proceedings, while nervously puffing a cigar of such fragrance that when it reached Sam's nostrils it gave him a desire to smoke, and he instinctively put his hand in his pocket for pipe and tobacco. But denying himself, he quietly stretched out in a comfortable position to peer over the edge of the cliff to see what kind of work was being done on his property.

"Well, Professor," he heard the smoker saying, "what's your opinion of it?"

The professor chucked some specimens thoughtfully from hand to hand and answered in measured precision : —

“It is apparently an ore of good quality, but that can of course only be ascertained by smelting it in sufficient quantity for a practical test of its quality.”

“Worth buying, do you think?”

“Certainly,” was answered with a decision that was presently qualified by, “at a reasonable figure, Colonel.”

“Of course,” the colonel answered impatiently; “it is n’t likely any one will ask a steep price for a mountain wood lot. But suppose they should get their ideas up, how much will it do to pay?”

“It is very convenient to the forge,” the professor pondered. “Hematites is apt to be hard, but it can be mixed with a softer ore to advantage,—the bed appears to be quite extensive,—I should consider it safe to pay a thousand dollars.”

Sam’s heart was beating so loudly that he mistook it for the ponderous throb of the forge-hammer two miles away, and prognosticated a storm from what he called the “hollerness o’ the air.”

“Pooh, a thousand dollars! Any of these people would jump at half that. It’s more money than they ever saw, and it’s nothing but a wood lot anyway.” The colonel threw down the stump of his cigar and stamped it out.

“And that would leave you five hundred to buy another race horse, another ‘Cock of the

Rock,' or to divide between me and our friend Trask here who is the real discoverer of the bed."

"Oh, William is going to be well paid for his time and trouble," said the colonel.

"Wal, I cal'late I ortu hev suthin' more 'n day's wages, seein' 'at I diskivered this 'ere ore bed," the person referred to remarked, squatting on his haunches so that his knees were on a line with his ears, his arms outstretched between them while he meditatively poked the earth with the point of the pick. "Yis, an' more 'n I c'd ha' airned diggin' jinshang, or trappin'. Sssh, hear that aire haoun' dawg? He's comin' right stret here. Gawlly bleue, I wisht I 'd fetched my gun."

He suddenly uncoiled his long legs and sprang up like an attenuated jack-in-the-box, bending an attentive ear as he stretched out a wide-spread hand to enjoin silence.

Sam was giving such close attention to this conversation that his ear did not catch the voice of the returning hound until drawn to it by the words and attitude of Trask. Almost in the same instant he saw the fox a long gunshot off on the brink of a ledge, picking his way along the naked rock, intent on the strategy of a puzzling trail, yet with nose and ears alert for any lurking enemy. Sam took in at a glance that most perfect picture of cunning that nature gives, the cun-

ning which it was his chief delight to foil, and the hunter's instinct rose above all other thought or plan, joined with a desire to atone for the morning's blundering shot.

His gun was aimed with deliberate celerity and in the same instant spat forth its deadly charge, and in the midst of a requiem of echoing report and resounding bugle-notes, poor Reynard tumbled down the cliff, almost at the feet of the prospectors, who were more startled by the sudden apparition than was he by the stroke that ended his life with its first shock.

The secret of his presence being disclosed, Sam descended to secure his quarry, which he did with well-simulated surprise at the discovery of witnesses of his shot.

"By the gret horn spoon!" he declared, coming to a sudden halt before the group, with the fox lying yet untouched at his feet. "You folks scairt me aouten a year's growth, a-comin' ontu ye so onexpected. I'd jes' as soon ha' thought o' runnin' ontu a camp-meetin' up here, for I s'posed Drive an' me an' the wil' critters hed the woods all tu aourselves. Hain't strayed off an' got lost ner nothin', hev ye?"

The colonel hesitated a moment, considering whether it were not best to accept this as an explanation of their presence, but at once dismissed it as not a plausible one.

“Why no, I can’t say we’re lost, for our friend Trask here seems to know the lay of the land. But I’d like to see the owner of this lot. There’s some timber on it I’d like to get. This yellow birch is just what I want. There are some pretty good trees here. That tree and that,” indicating with his forefinger a couple of shaggy giants that reared their rustling manes just beside him, — “don’t you think they’d do, Professor?”

The professor ran a critical eye over them and nodded a dubious affirmative.

“The’ ’s slews o’ yaller birch all through here, fer two mild, jest as thick as ’t is on this lot,” Sam said.

“Yes, I know, but I want the pick of it all, and I’d as soon begin here as anywhere.”

“I don’t see what on airth anybody wants o’ yaller birch,” said Sam; “ef ’t was cherry birch for furniter, naow, but yaller birch, good land, what du ye want o’ that?”

“Never mind what I want of it,” said the colonel, with the air of one impatient of questioning, “I want it. I’ve been informed this part of the mountain belongs to a man by the name of Lovel. Do you know him?”

“Yes, I know him.”

“Do you think he’d be likely to sell it? For a reasonable price, of course, you understand.”

“Yes, I know him. He’ll sell,” Sam said, and

then continued with apparent irrelevance, as he stirred the upturned velvet-black earth with his toe, "This 'ere is a kinder cur'ous lookin' sile o' land. Some on 't looks as 'ough it hed got rusty a-lyin' raoun' useless so long. Guess like 's not the' 's iron in 't."

The colonel deigned to notice it with a side-wise glance.

"Ah, yes, it does look a little odd. Trask has been digging some of his wonderful roots here. The owner's name is Lovel; I believe I'll call and see him."

Sam straightened his fox upon a convenient log preparatory to skinning it, seated himself astride it, and began whetting his knife on his boot.

"You need n't bother tu. He 's right here all ready fer a trade. I 'm him. Naow, haow much be you goin' tu offer?"

"You!" cried the colonel quite taken by surprise; and then, advancing toward him with his right hand cordially outstretched, "Why, Mr. Lovel, I 'm delighted to see you, sir. De-lighted. You are just the man I want to see, and meeting you here saves lots of bother. My name's Ketchum; they call me Colonel sometimes."

Sam stuck his knife in the log, and not without a flattered sense of receiving distinguished consideration took the proffered hand of the

most celebrated speculator and fast man of the county.

“And this is my friend, Professor Stillman, and Mr. Trask. You may have met Trask, for he ’s a hunter,” the colonel said, introducing his companions. “That was a capital shot, Mr. Lovel. If I ’d made it, I sh’d be proud as a peacock. I never could shoot a fox. They’re too smart for me. Have a cigar, Mr. Lovel?”

Sam was nothing loath to accept the proffered Havana, already recommended by the fragrance of its predecessor beyond all need of words. The colonel obligingly lighted a new-fangled match in a little vial of liquid and held it for him till the cigar was properly fired. He had never tasted anything with so delicious a flavor before ; yet it only made him hungrier for his more satisfying pipe. Having his own cigar well lighted, the colonel took it from his lips to say, while he regarded Sam with a shrewd downward glance, “Now, about this wood lot,” — he emphasized wood, — “what are you going to ask for it? Cash on the nail, the minute the deed is signed?”

“What ’ll you give?” Sam asked, feeling the edge of his knife with a critical touch.

“Oh, I don’t want to put a price on another man’s property,” — encouraging his cigar with a few rapid whiffs. “Name your price and I ’ll tell you whether I can pay it.”

Sam nerved himself to a supreme effrontery and made his offer in a voice so steady he wondered if it was his own.

“Wal, then, I’ll take fifteen hunderd dollars fer’t;” and was so appalled by the extravagance of the price he had named that he did not venture to look up, but began carefully ripping the hind leg of the fox.

“Wheew,” the colonel blew out a mouthful of smoke in a long whistle of surprise. “Fifteen hundred dollars! Good Lord, man, are you crazy? Why that’s more than a thousand acres of this mountain land would bring. You’re joking, Mr. Lovel. Let’s quit this fooling and talk business.”

“I mean just what I say. Fifteen hunderd is my price,” Sam said, gathering confidence he knew not how.

“Oh, well then, it’s no use talking,” the colonel declared, with assumed indifference that scarcely concealed his vexation. “I don’t want the birch bad enough to give that, or half of that. Some other lot will do as well. Come, Professor, we might as well be off. Come, Trask, show the way out.”

Trask shouldered his pick and spade and led the way with long strides, followed with slower steps by his companions, who presently halted and conferred together in low tones. The colonel returned a little to ask:—

"You really mean to say that fifteen hundred is your price?"

"Sartainly," said Sam, stripping a leg of the fox.

"It's ridiculous. Fifteen hundred dollars for a patch of mountain land only worth the wood and lumber that's on it."

Sam suddenly faced toward him: "Look a here, Colonel, what's the use o' yer foolin'? 'Tain't the wood you want. It's this 'ere iron ore." He picked up a handful of the black and rusty fragments and held them out in his open palm. "I do' know what it's wuth, mebby four times what I ask fer it, but you c'n hev it fer that, hit er miss."

It had seldom befallen Colonel Ketchum's brazen face to be surprised into such blank astonishment as now overspread it.

"Who the devil told you there was ore here?" he blurted out.

"Oh, I've known it fer quite a spell," Sam said with a coolness that was amazing to himself, considering he had known it but half an hour.

"Well, if there is, it may not be worth a thing."

"I've hearn there was them 'at 'ould pay a thaousan' dollars fer 't. It's consid'able handy tu the forge. I guess the Comp'ny 'ould give suthin' fer 't."

The colonel retired to confer with the professor, then came back: "Well, I've concluded to take the chances and give you a thousand." Sam shook his head. "Well, let's split the difference and call it twelve fifty."

"No," said Sam, completing the stripping of the fox of its beauty and tossing the carcass aside, "I guess I'll give the Comp'ny a chance fust."

The colonel chewed his cigar, forgetting to nurse its languishing fire, and after some moments of silence said, "Well, I'm going to be a confounded fool and give you your price."

"I p'sume tu say I'm the fool," said Sam, with a nervous laugh.

"Mr. Lovel," the other said, regarding him with growing admiration, "I'm not surprised that you take in the foxes."

"I can't help knockin' 'em over when they blunder right ontu me."

"Well, Mr. Lovel, I'll pay you cash down, when we get the papers made out, to-morrow."

"All right. An' naow I s'pose we might as well hyper aout o' this," Sam said, carefully shaking the fur of the fox-skin into comely fluffiness. "Be you folks goin' my way? Come, ol' dawg."

Drive reluctantly arose from the bed he had made in the leaves, refreshed himself with a sniff of the fox-tail dangling from his master's pocket, and limped with gingerly, foot-sore steps in the rear

of the party, as it took its way down the rough descent. The colonel discoursed with as continual volubility as the uncertain footing would permit, and seemed in excellent spirits for a man who had just made a bad bargain, as he continually averred he had done. After appointing a meeting at Joel Bartlett's for "drawin' writin's" for the next morning, Sam parted from his new acquaintances where their ways and his diverged, and held across the fields homeward, with a light heart.

"I've allus faoun' my luck in the woods," he thought. "It fetched me Huldry. And naow it's saved me a hum fer her an' bub an' the ol' folks."

CHAPTER XXVI.

GOOD-NIGHT.

As with swift strides that seemed too slow to carry the good news home to Huldah, Sam topped the crest of a pasture knoll, he became aware of a familiar odor of rank tobacco too late to avoid its source, for in the next moment he was confronted by Antoine, making a short cut homeward from his day's chopping.

"Hill-o, Sam, dat was you, don't it. Ah'll most s'pose prob'ly you'll ant felt fer went huntin'. Say, Sam, ant he too bad 'baout dat Bascoms howe up evree body an' run hesef away. Dat was too shem. Dey say dat poor hol' Buttlegal mos' crazyin' hees head fer loss hees two honded dollar, an' de Widder Needham mos' as crazy fer glad she ant marree it, an' seh, dey was tol' dey was costubble you all up an' was goin' fer sol' you all aout.

"But it was mek you felt good yet fer git dat fox, ant he? You was look pooty good nachel, hein? Ah tol' you Ah was felt bad fer you, Sam, an' all of it. What all we goin' do if One' Lasha broke off hees shaup, fer loafin' place?

Mees Purintim say he'll gat fer go on taown, an' Aunt Jerrushy. Oh, dat was too shem. Ah tol' you, Sam, if Ah'll can fan all de money dat hol' feller bury, Ah'll len' you of it an' set you all up."

"I'm 'bleeged tu ye, Antwine," Sam answered at the first opportunity given him. "I should n't wonder ef we'd continner on in the shop, a spell yit. But I've got tu be a-moggin'," and he pushed on, leaving the Canadian staring after him, for once in his life speechless, till he ejaculated with a deep-drawn sigh:—

"Ah b'lieved he was so troublesomed, it mek it crazy in hees head of it. Dat too bad fer heem." At length, overwhelmed by a sudden suspicion, he exclaimed, "By Tunder, Ah bet he fan dat money heself. Dat too bad fer me."

When Sam saw his own house light shining through the early autumnal gloaming, chimney and roof taking form against the hazy sky and nebulous glimmer of relighted stars, and traced the dusky slopes and swells of meadow and pasture, they had never seemed so dear as now, with the sense of reëstablished possession.

Now he could see Huldah appear at one of the kitchen windows whose welcoming light he had seen on the hill; he knew she was looking out for him as she had doubtless done for countless times since the shadows began to blend with the

hazy twilight, and the crickets, warmed to life in the soft air, chirped faintly in farewell concert.

Huldah's face, sadly sobered of late, brightened at the sight of her husband, and its brightness was mingled with surprise when she noted his unexpected cheerfulness.

"Why, Sam, you must ha' had 'stror'nary luck a-huntin' erless you faoun' a better farm 'an you expected tu, up in the maountain."

"I hev hed a streak o' luck in the woods ag'in, Huld," he said; and when he had hung up his gun and kissed his boy, he beckoned her to the bedroom and told her the whole of his story.

Aunt Jerusha's face, sober almost to sadness, yet calm with the peace conquered in many trials, met his in questioning surprise and caught a reflection of its renewed cheerfulness as he passed her, saying, "I've fetcht hum good news, Aunt Jerushy, an' Huld'y'll tell ye," and going into the shop he imparted it to his father and Uncle Lisha.

Before the evening was far spent, Joseph Hill, Solon, and Pelatiah came in, assuming a cheerfulness of speech that their funereal faces belied.

Influenced by Sam's happy, care-free manner, the old comrades drifted into the familiar channels of discourse. At length, unable longer to restrain his curiosity, Solon said:—

"Samule, we come in tu express aour symptons,

it bein' onderstood quite ginerall 'at you had got revolved pecuniary wi' that aire Bascom an' him hevin' absquatelated."

"We've felt dreffly 'baout it up tu aour haouse," Joseph Hill broke in with his deliberate drawl. "I do' know 's I ever hearn father talk so much abaout anythin' 'thaout 't was Ticonderogue, an' I tol' M'ri' 'at he 's cussed Bascom 'baout as bad as ever he did Tories, seems 's 'ough, but I d' know."

Solon continued, "By ginerall hints since we here assembled, I've gethered you've been reimbusted. Be we so tu onderstan' it, an' ef so, wherefore an' whyfore?"

Sam tilted his chair backward, stretched his legs straight out before him, clasped his hands behind his head, and fixed his eyes on the dingy ceiling,

"Mebby," he said after a considerable pause, during which the hum of the women's voices, Timothy's careful feeding of the stove, and the clatter of the baby's playthings could be heard in the kitchen, "Mebby I've got a rich uncle 'at you never hearn on, an' mebbly I've busted intu a bank, an' mebbly I've faoun' a ore bed handy to the forge, an' mebbly I've diskivered perpet'al motion. Bimeby you'll know, but take my word fer 't, things is all right an' we're goin' tu keep right on a-visitin' in this shop. But the's one thing we don't wantar fergit the fust run o' sleddin' 'at

comes, an' that is tu all hands turn aout an' draw up them Buttlles gals a big wood-pile. They've lost all the' savin's an' hain't got no rich uncle. An' naow I've got tu git that boy asleep."

The lives of the Danvis folks resumed their ordinary tranquil course. For me, time has touched them as lightly as it has the crowns of their own mountains, which centuries have not changed.

I find myself forgetful of the lapse of fifty years, thinking of my old friends as yet alive, preserving the quaintness of speech, the homely pastimes, the simplicity of dress and manners, and above all the neighborly kindness that belonged to their day and generation untouched by the strifes and ambitions and changes of the busy world that chafes and beats around them, and without a desire for a part therein.

The uneventful day is spent. The shadows of the mountains and the early twilight creep across the quiet valley. Out of the dusk and deepening gloom, homestead lights shine forth like stars in a nether sky, and after a time go out, one by one.

I cannot say Farewell, as if the lights of my old friends were extinguished forever, but only, — Good-Night.

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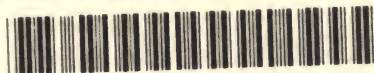
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